the President seemed to be totally, really oblivious, or certainly uninhibited by this fact."

"The tapes you mentioned were stored, are they stored by a particular date?"

"Yes, sir, they are."

For anyone for whom it was not yet clear, Dash clarified the awesome import:

"If either Mr. Dean, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Ehrlichman, or Mr. Colson had particular meetings in the Oval Office with the President on any particular dates that have been testified before this committee, there would be a tape recording with the President of that full conversation, would there not?"

There would be indeed. Dash had only one more question—the only one now that mattered: "What would be the best way to reconstruct those conversations, Mr. Butterfield, in the President's Oval Office?"

"Well, in the obvious manner," Butterfield responded: "to obtain the tape and play it."

That meant it would not just be Dean's word against the president's—if only the committee could subpoena those tapes.

THE FIRST SCENE IN THAT THRILLER UNFOLDED AT THE WHITE HOUSE West Gate, where two young staffers of the special prosecutor's office arrived with a subpoena for tapes of nine key conversations—the first subpoena of a president since Aaron Burr's treason trial in 1805.

The president, amazed that anyone as close to him as Butterfield would not have understood that the correct answer to questions he'd been asked was "executive privilege," from his hospital bed, addressed a letter to Judge Sirica, who would be deciding this Watergate case, too: "With the utmost respect for the court of which you are chief judge, and for the branch of government of which it is a part, I must decline to obey the command of that subpoena. In doing so I follow the example of a long line of my predecessors as President of the United States who have consistently adhered to the position that the President is not subject to compulsory process from the courts." Two other letters he addressed to the Watergate committee concerning their own subpoena. In one, the president asserted that the "special nature of tape recordings of private conversations" made them even more privileged than paper documents, because they "contain comments that persons with different perspectives would inevitably interpret in different ways." The other letter indicated he refused to meet to discuss the matter.

Ervin read both letters aloud in the caucus room, drawling out a response in indubitably Ervinian fashion: The president was not "immune from all the duties and responsibilities which devolve upon all the other mortals who dwell in this land." He said the crisis was worse than the Civil War—was, in fact, "the greatest tragedy this country has ever suffered." And, live on national TV, his committee voted unanimously to sue the President of the United States. That was unprecedented, too.

Judge Sirica set arguments for August 7. President Nixon announced he would listen only to the opinion of the Supreme Court—four of whose nine members, cynics pointed out, he had appointed. A showdown between the Constitution's three branches was set. It would unspool for months—while the TV melodrama rolled on, audiences more riveted than ever.

Herbert Kalmbach sat down at the great green table after Butterfield was dismissed. He described his consternation with the "James Bond scenario" he had been drafted into: passing wads of hundred-dollar bills in hotel rooms to a man he knew only under aliases. The man was Anthony Ulasewicz, the Runyonesque former New York City cop on call whenever the White House needed a man in the shadows. Kalmbach had barreled into John Ehrlichman's office in July 1972, imploring reassurance: "John, I am looking right into your eyes," he recollected saying. "I know Jeanne and your family, you know Barbara and my family. You know that my family and my reputation mean everything to me, and it is just absolutely necessary, John, that you tell me, first that John Dean has the authority to direct me in this assignment"—in other words, that John Dean was not acting on his own but that he had the approval of a higher-up—"that it is a proper assignment, and that I am to go forward with it."

"And did he look you in the eyes?" Sam Dash asked.

"Yes, he did."

"What did he say to you?"

"He said, 'Herb, John Dean does have the authority, it is proper, and you are to go forward.'"

THE REVELATION OF TAPES RAISED ANTICIPATION THAT THE SLUICE GATES of truth might finally open. Then John Ehrlichman and Bob Haldeman testified for eight days between them through early August, and dashed those hopes. Ehrlichman, who claimed "no recollection" of any such conversation with Kalmbach, was supposed to be the nice guy of the team. Not this week. Senator Ervin sanctimoniously recited the parable of the Good Samaritan. Ehrlichman snapped back, "I read the

Bible, I don't quote it." He used mocking nicknames for the principals; Sam Dash was "the Professor"; John Dean was "the star witness"—and Watergate's true villain. Which didn't make sense, considering that Ehrlichman didn't seem to consider any of the actions the Watergate committee was looking into villainous. The president, he insisted, was only fighting for peace on earth and goodwill toward all men. The people opposing him (who were "favorable to the North Vietnamese and their allies") were enemies of same. He couldn't find anything "seriously embarrassing" in operations like the burglarization of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist—an operation he himself had approved "if it is not traceable," according to a August 1971 memo the committee offered into evidence. It was, he insisted, "a vital national security inquiry," "well within the President's inherent Constitutional powers."

Senator Talmadge: "If the President could authorize a covert break-in, [and] you don't know exactly where that power would be limited, you don't think it could include murder or other crimes *beyond* covert break-in, do you?"

Coolly, with an accent that made him sound like a working-class white ethnic from Milwaukee, the bald witness responded: "I don't know where that line is, Senator."

The Georgian pressed.

"Do you remember when we were in law school, we studied a famous principle of law that came from England and also is well known in this country, that no matter how humble a man's cottage is, that even the King of England cannot enter without his consent?"

The witness set his jaw and furrowed his brow. "I am afraid," he said, "that has been considerably eroded over the years."

No pause from Talmadge: "Down in my country we still think it a pretty legitimate principle of law."

The chamber exploded in cheers. You could read the shock on the bald man's face.

IT WAS THE MOST INTENSE OUTBURST FROM THE GALLERIES SINCE A MAN named Gordon Strachan, a Haldeman aide, preceded him on the stand. Strachan was one of those sad young White House men the hearings had thrown up in such profusion. Senator Joseph Montoya of New Mexico, who liked to give each witness a chance to expiate his sins, asked him, "Because of Watergate, many young people are writing to us expressing great consternation about our country and also saying that public service is not as attractive as before Watergate. . . . What advice do you have for those people?"

An innocent-looking blond young man, twenty-nine years old, his face still pockmarked by acne like a teenager's, his lip trembling, sitting next to a lawyer in pinstripes, replied: "My advice would be to stay away." The hearing room erupted in laughter.

But nervous laughter. The kind that bespeaks a radical discomfort—like when you really want to cry. The moment immediately became one of Watergate's great conversation pieces. And when it was his turn to make his closing statement, that was what Ehrlichman chose to address.

"Your gallery laughed," he noted. "But I don't think many Americans laughed. Nor do I agree with Gordon's advice. . . . Our government and our politics are only as idealistic as the people in those buildings."

Ehrlichman was arguing that he was one of those idealists. "If you go to work for the President and the executive branch there are very few in Congress or the media that are going to throw rosebuds at you. . . .

"You will encounter a local culture which scoffs at family life and morality just as it adulates the opposite and you will find some people who have fallen for that line.

"But you will also find in politics and government many great people who know that a pearl of great price is not had for the asking and who feel that this country and its heritage are worth the work, the abuse, the struggle, and the sacrifices. Don't stay away. Come and join them and do it better."

He meant "better than his inquisitors on the Ervin Committee." The editors of the conservative *Chicago Tribune* found that peroration so moving they printed it in full. It was a profoundly Nixonian moment. Staging the rhetorical distinction between the uprightly patriotic and the degenerate aliens who sought to subvert patriotism was what Nixonism was all about. The masterpiece had been his speech of November 3, 1969: two million Americans had just protested his failure to end the Vietnam War, a veritable outpouring from Middle America, and Nixon managed to turn them into loud-mouthed hippies calling for "the first defeat in our nation's history." He had continued: "It might not be fashionable to speak of our national destiny these days." But he would do so nonetheless—coining the phrase the "great silent majority" to identify those who supported him in Vietnam, because they were patriots. The approval rating of his handling of the war had gone up from 58 to 77 percent overnight after that speech.

On July 24, Ehrlichman's crew-cut right-hand man, Bob Haldeman, began testifying. He was uncharacteristically accommodating—until Senator Weicker pulled out a memo to Haldeman dated October 14, 1971, and Haldeman exposed the other side of the Silent Majority rhe-

torical coin: it welcomed division. It welcomed hate. For if the world was divided between good and evil, hating evil was the appropriate response. And what violations of procedural nicety weren't permissible in order to *vanquish evil*?

The memo consisted of advance instructions for a presidential appearance in Charlotte, North Carolina, with the Reverend Billy Graham. Demonstrators would be "violent," it explained. "They will have extremely obscene signs." The senator held up the document and pointed to the margin: "Is that your writing there where it says, 'good'?"

Haldeman acknowledged it was.

The senator continued reading: "It will not only be directed toward the President, *but also toward Billy Graham.*" He pointed out that, also in Haldeman's handwriting, the words "also toward Billy Graham" had been underlined, and beside them had been penciled in "great." The administration *welcomed* violence and obscenity directed at the president and a beloved divine.

Once more the hearing room erupted in that odd nervous laughter.

Weicker had revealed something ugly and untoward about how the White House thought and worked. The attitude showed up in the writings of Watergate conspirators. E. Howard Hunt wrote pseudonymous thrillers as a hobby. They were being brought back into print under his own name by opportunistic publishers. In one of them one of his heroes intoned, "We became lawless in a struggle for the rule of law—semi-outlaws who risk their lives to put down the savagery of others." And G. Gordon Liddy wrote in his memoir, "To permit the thought, spirit, life-style of the '60s movement to achieve power . . . was a thought as offensive to me as was the thought of surrender to a career Japanese soldier in 1945."

It was precisely such reaction to the insurgencies of the 1960s that led to Nixon's reelection in 1972, with an unprecedented forty-nine-state landslide. Not in spite of the paranoia and dread that was its unseemly underside—the same paranoia and dread that helped produce Watergate—but in some sense because of it. It was Richard Nixon's unique contribution to all the conservative Republican electoral successes to come over the next few decades. But it had rarely been articulated, held up to the light, as Senator Weicker did now.

There had always been another political consequence of the "thought, spirit, life-style of the '60s" that the Liddys and Hunts and Haldemans didn't quite grasp. It was a new vision of patriotism produced in the 1960s—a perfect passion for the rule of law, of the fairest possible proceduralism, a longing for political innocence that pundits referred to as the "New Politics." It was Sam Ervin's sort of patriotism. It was the patriotism confronted by George McGovern in his acceptance speech at the 1972 Democratic convention: "We reject the view of those who say, 'America—love it or leave it.' We reply, 'Let us change it so we may love it the more.'" It was the spirit that helped explain why law school applications were increasing by almost 50 percent among young people: young idealists wanted to be like Sam Dash—or like the staff assistants who lurked in the background of the TV shots, whose hair and sideburns were frequently as long as any hippie's. (The real threats to law and order—the hearing witnesses—wore crew cuts.)

Here was a moment that framed what Watergate meant: a battle over the meaning of America.

Two visions of patriotism clashed that summer in the letters pages. Why, a man from Indiana asked, was Ted Kennedy "always finding fault with our good, hard-working President? Our country needs Richard Nixon. We need more men like him. Many people prayed for his re-election. I am one of them." They believed the Ervin Committee was "so intent on putting a noose around Nixon's neck that they are blindly acting as pallbearers for the nation."

The other side critiqued—decorously, usually, for they were liberals—the "alarmingly high percentage of Americans more than willing to tolerate lawlessness as long as it is conducted in the name of 'Americanism' or even 'law and order.'" They addressed Sam Ervin as a man who "holds the future of the right of free citizenship in your hand as fully as have only a few others in history"; quoted the *Federalist Papers;* complained "that the most thoroughgoing effort to convert the United States into a police state came from the most publicly pious, God-Fearing President of modern times." One boasted in a letter to the *Washington Post* of his son's ambition to be a public servant—even though "he possesses two qualities that 'at this point in time' appear to be definitely undesirable . . . he is scrupulously honest and he has a very good memory." Their appeal to the word *patriotism* was just as explicit as the conservatives' appeal to it: "Any President's true patriotism would show in his own rejection of unlimited power," one of them wrote.

In recent years the first group's version of patriotism had ruled public opinion. In April 1970, for instance, on the eve of the Kent State shootings and in the wake of the frightening disorder of the late 1960s, 76 percent in a Gallup poll maintained that the First Amendment should be suspended if that meant no more disruptive protests in the streets. These were the people who had elected Richard Nixon in 1968, in a

tangle of rage and piety. Who believed, with Richard Nixon, that our neighbors might be our enemies, and our enemies might destroy us.

But now a shift was afoot. The suspicious circles were expanding into places like the Worcester, Massachusetts, living room of a conservative blue-collar worker whose son happened to be Abbie Hoffman, the Chicago Seven defendant and hippie savant. Now John Hoffman sat in front of his tiny black-and-white TV and told himself that, yes, "Abbie had been right all along": American decency was indeed a sham.

They expanded, too, into a Republican county thirty miles down the road from Pekin, Illinois, that a liberal college professor visited late in July and wrote about for the *Chicago Tribune*. The first person he visited was the state's attorney, who showed his visitor the little plastic bug he had placed atop a framed letter from Richard Nixon thanking him for running the local reelection effort. "Sometimes I can just sense what people are thinking when I pass them on the street. They're saying to themselves: 'If that's what goes on in Washington, I wonder what Paul's got to hide up in his office.'"

Down the hall, the local circuit court judge said regretfully that if John Dean's testimony had been given in his courtroom he would have had to find it credible.

A young farmer's wife told the visitor: "It's just so stupid. Why didn't the man"—Nixon—"just have more trust in the American public?"

And down the highway, in the men's grill room at Bloomington Country Club, the guys shooting the bull after the first round of a golf tournament started in about Watergate.

"You know," one exclaimed, "this thing is just like cheating on your wife. I mean, if you were cheating on your wife, you wouldn't stand up and tell everyone the truth about it. Would you?"

When most of the golfers chortled their agreement, another told them all to shut up: "Cut it out. You know darn well that this thing isn't like that at all." The liberal college professor reported that the consort finally agreed: "Cheating on your wife is just not the same thing as cheating on your country."

In a new poll, the majority of the American people said they wished they'd voted for George S. McGovern. Nixon's approval rating fell to 31 percent, the lowest of any president since Hoover. The favorability ratings of the Ervin Committee members ranged from 69 to 84 percent. Howard Baker was mentioned for the 1976 Republican nomination. Only 17 percent believed the press was out "to get President Nixon on Watergate," and only 40 percent now thought there was too much cov-

erage. Americans did tell the Harris poll they found the president more believable than John Dean—but only by 38 to 37 percent. "Apparently," one dry wit wrote to his local newspaper, the "President of the United of States is one percent more believable than a confessed felon."

THEN AN ENTIRELY NEW WHITE HOUSE CRISIS PRESENTED ITSELF: VICE President Spiro Agnew, that pathetic man a heartbeat away from the presidency, was in legal trouble.

A virtually unknown figure nationally in 1968, with only a year's experience as Maryland governor and four years as Baltimore County's chief executive before that, he had become Nixon's running mate for the most craven of political reasons: he had caught Nixon's eye after putting down urban riots with unmatched ruthlessness. He was a veritable freak for conformity and order. One of his county employees told a journalist the story of how he once returned from a two-week camping trip unshaven, eager to get back to work; Agnew sent him home with orders not to return until he shaved. Agnew had accepted the nomination, intoning, "I stand here with a deep sense of the improbability of this moment." In office he was reduced to attending ribbon cuttings and attending to a policy portfolio of fifth-tier issues like maritime affairs and Native American rights—until, in October 1969, Pat Buchanan, practically his only West Wing fan, came up with the idea of drafting him as the administration's attack dog against the radicals, and the liberal media elites the White House believed to be cosseting radicals. Or, in Agnew's memorable words, "the cacophony of seditious drivel emanating from the best-publicized clowns in our society and their fans in the Fourth Estate."

He was still sticking to that script—blasting the Ervin Committee for using "McCarthy tactics," and for exploiting "the misguided zeal of a few individuals" in order to "wash our dirty linen in public." He said he'd "never been more proud of my party" than during Watergate, and called Ervin's hearings a "rain dance" that could "hardly fail to muddy the waters of justice beyond repair." On August 6 he said he agreed with his president that Watergate was not an issue for Congress but belonged in the courts instead—because he had "confidence in the criminal justice system of the United States." Which had to be a bit embarrassing when it was announced on August 7 that the criminal justice system was investigating *him*—for accepting bags full of cash from construction companies from his years as Baltimore County executive and Maryland governor.

"I am innocent of any wrongdoing," Agnew declared, pinning the

hubbub on "masochistic persons looking for all that is wrong." His lawyer, writing to the presiding judge, mimicked the arguments of the president: "I do not acknowledge that you or any Grand Jury have any right to the records of the Vice President. Nor do I acknowledge the propriety of any Grand Jury investigation of possible wrongdoing on the part of the Vice President so long as he occupies that office."

Investigators, undaunted, kept investigating.

Nixon gave his next speech to the public on August 15. For this one, unlike every other speech from the Oval Office, the picture of his family, the bust of Abraham Lincoln, and the American flag were out of view. The previous evening, at 11:45 P.M., bombing strikes over Cambodia ended fifteen minutes before the War Powers Act, passed over the president's veto, would have rendered their continuation a violation of federal law. But those who thought the president might finally be humbled heard him say instead, "Not only was I unaware of any cover-up, I was unaware there was anything to cover up." He said those who kept vigil over their "backward-looking obsession with Watergate" might "destroy our hopes for the future," and keep the government from "matters of greater importance." (The phone-tapped Joseph Kraft responded mercilessly: "Like, for instance, what? . . . No business before the American people is anywhere near as important as achieving honest government—which is what the Watergate affair is all about.") Nixon pointed to his predecessors: "Every President since World War II has believed that in internal security matters, the President has the power to authorize wiretaps without first obtaining a search warrant."

Bottom line: releasing tapes "would set a precedent that would cripple all future Presidents." So he would refuse to do it. (Barry Goldwater Jr., a congressman from Los Angeles, answered curtly: "He asks for the trust of the American people, but he doesn't trust them enough to let them hear the tapes.") The reason, Nixon concluded, was that the relationship between a president and his aides was like that "between a lawyer and his client, between a priest and a penitent, and between a husband and wife": it required confidentiality. (A letter writer wondered if it was accidental that he omitted the relation between a psychiatrist and his patient.)

Only a little over a quarter of the 77 percent of the country who heard the speech believed it. Fifty-four percent found it "not at all convincing." A habitual presidential defender, columnist William S. White, called it "extraordinarily weak." Barry Jr.'s dad, the 1964 Republican nominee, said Nixon "did not add anything to his other speeches that would tend to divert suspicion from him."

He stepped into the box again a week later for his first press conference in fourteen months to announce the appointment of Henry Kissinger as secretary of state in addition to his current post as national security advisor. But eighteen of the twenty-one questions hounded him on Watergate. Of the three exceptions, two were on Spiro Agnew, and the third was on whether Nixon would apologize to the American people for ordering some 3,700 bombing raids over Cambodia, hiding the fact even from the top military brass via, the public had just learned, a falsified set of ledgers, while publicly claiming to "have scrupulously observed the neutrality of Cambodia." Clark Mollenhoff, the toughest old bastard in the Washington press corps, all but accused the president of being a dictator: "Where is the check on authoritarianism by the executive if the president is the sole judge of what the executive branch makes available and suppresses?"

AT LEAST NIXON STILL HAD RONALD REAGAN.

On August 2, 1973, returning from a monthlong vacation, the California governor called the Ervin Committee a "lynching" and a "witch hunt"—even as the *Washington Post* reported Nixon had spied on *him*, spreading stories about him behaving oddly at a party. He managed to excuse the president even for that. "I don't know what they're referring to," he told the *Post*. "I was a perfect picture of decorum. You've really caught me here with mixed emotions because I don't know whether to get a sort of glint in my eye and let you think there's a side of me that no one knows."

But what about Nixon taping him when he visited the Oval Office? What did he think about that? No big deal. "Matter of fact," Reagan said, the tapes probably "made me sound good." (They did not. In one 1971 conversation, Nixon called him "pretty shallow" and of "limited mental capacity." Kissinger called the notion of Reagan as president "inconceivable.")

When the news came out that Vice President Spiro Agnew was under federal investigation for taking bribes not just as county executive in Maryland, but in his vice presidential office, David Broder quoted Republican after Republican not daring to defend him. "After the Watergate experience, no one is eager to be the first to rush into print with a denial," a state chairman said. Ronald Reagan, however, was plenty eager. "I have known Ted Agnew to be an honest and honorable man," he told Broder. "He, like any other citizen of high character, should be considered innocent until proven otherwise." (The same week he said an alleged cop killer, not yet tried, deserved the electric chair.)

Came next the president's August 15 speech, and another Reagan encomium: "His message was the voice of reason which went a long way toward putting the whole situation in better perspective." It came as Agnew's legal trouble, as one wag had recently put it, became "the best news to reach second-string Presidential candidates since Edward Kennedy's car went off that bridge." The second-string presidential candidate named Ronald Reagan seemed determined to sabotage that opportunity. It drove his advisors to distraction.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak had published a column about the Reagan aides positioning their boss as a presidential prospect. They cited his record as "the successful architect of clean, frugal government, free of scandal and geared to lower taxes," and his distance from an irretrievably corrupted White House. Problem was, his backers complained, Reagan kept defending Watergate conspirators "as no worse than double parkers." His aides were quoted rejoicing that Reagan *finally* seemed to get it—that he had ceased his defense of the president and was concentrating instead on his new bid for national attention: Proposition 1, the tax-limitation initiative for which he had won a spot on the November 6 California ballot. "He believes the appeal of lower taxes, limited spending, and reduced government is universal."

He was about the only one who believed it. At the annual June governors' conference at the Sahara Tahoe Hotel, everything he said seemed calculated to remove him from serious consideration as an important voice in the national conversation. A columnist surveyed the governors about what they thought should be the top national priority. Democrat Reuben Askew of Florida said "learning to live with nature." Tom McCall, Republican of Oregon, listed "strong land-use planning." Republican governor Otis Bowen of Indiana said "improved transportation services." Almost everyone mentioned inflation, the environment, and restoring the integrity of government. Governor Reagan alone, as if from a different political planet, said, "Our highest national priority should be to halt the trend toward bigger, more expensive government at all levels before it is too late." He added an apocalyptic fillip: "We as citizens will either master government as our servant or ultimately it will master us."

He called a press conference on the ballot initiative. Reporters asked only about Watergate. ("About 90 percent of everything said so far is unfounded rumor, accusations, and so forth," he answered.) He explained the tax-limitation idea at a session of fellow governors. With a single exception (Governor Meldrim Thomson Jr. of New Hampshire, who was such an extremist he'd once proposed issuing atomic weapons

to members of the National Guard), they called it foolhardy—"a political ploy and an insult to the legislative branch," said one Democrat. A Republican called it "superfluous, unwise, and unnecessary."

Reagan, unfazed, said the governors simply hadn't understood it. Then he got to work selling it back home. He was nothing if not a salesman.

He also had an ace in the hole. Wealthy backers pumped out $436,452 (including a $110,000 loan guaranteed by thirteen of them, including car dealer Holmes Tuttle, oil scion William H. Doheny, and construction magnate J. Robert Fluor) to collect the 520,806 signatures needed to get it for the ballot—the most spent to qualify a ballot initiative since these same men spent $396,000 on a 1972 drive to cut state workers' salaries.

The 5,700 words of the complicated measure included a rollback of the personal income tax rate from 8.3 to 7 percent and a provision that if the state collected more than an allotted amount in any year the surplus would be refunded to taxpayers. It established an emergency fund of not more than 0.2 percent of taxpayer income to maintain government functions—but only the governor could declare the emergency. It also set tax limits for cities, counties, and special districts. Finally, it exempted the wealthy from California tax law's $10,000 mandatory minimum assessment, and included a rebate for lower-income taxpayers. At the end of August the state government's official nonpartisan fiscal legislative analyst, a highly respected bureaucrat of thirty years' standing named A. Alan Post, whom Reagan had once offered a job as his administration's finance director, weighed in with his assessment: Proposition 1 would force an immediate $620 million reduction in next year's state budget. Reagan roared back that Post was serving as a "cat's paw" for Democratic Assembly Speaker Robert Moretti. He said he only wished Post's were "honest mistakes—they were not. They were deliberate distortions."

Post had just been profiled as a model of objectivity and rectitude on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. He had once been, in fact, a registered Republican—then changed his status to "declined to state," to foreground his nonpartisan scrupulousness. The chairman of the California senate Republican caucus rose to defend him: "Alan Post doesn't slant figures." So did the Republican floor leader in the California assembly: "I have never personally been of the opinion he is partisan." Post appeared before the assembly Ways and Means Committee to patiently explain his statistics-laden seventy-five-page conclusions that over a four-year period Prop 1 would require budget cuts

totaling $3.5 billion, and would merely shift the tax burden to localities and property taxes. The governor's chief deputy director of finance called that "misleading, distorted, and biased." A shouting match nearly broke out.

Post appeared a second time, offering five ways the governor could shrink state government without forcing a fiscal crisis, including privatizing the Department of Consumer Affairs, increasing tuition and student fees, and reducing tax relief for senior citizens. Moretti listed all the nonpartisan organizations that called Proposition 1 irresponsible, including the League of Women voters. Michael Deaver, one of six top gubernatorial aides who'd taken a leave of absence to work for the referendum campaign, promptly declared that the League "has lost its right to be regarded as a non-partisan, fact-finding organization." Complained Moretti, "Apparently anybody who disagrees with him is just 'bad people.'" Indeed, Reagan had first attempted to pass his tax reform via statute, but a state senate committee bottled it up. He had labeled that partisan "sabotage"—even though it lost a vote in plain daylight, by a margin of 80 percent, including a majority of his fellow Republicans.

THE DEBATE UNFOLDED WITH WHOLESALE PRICES UP 60 PERCENT SINCE the beginning of the year. The University of Michigan's Survey Research Center reported consumer confidence was at the lowest point in its twenty-five years of measuring. Only 30 percent expected "good times" in 1974. Meat prices spiked again. A cartoonist depicted a grocer frantically stamping items that were still in a housewife's cart: "Hold it—prices just went up again!" Another had a newsman grimly reading a report from the White House: "The wholesale price index soared—with honor, of course." A *Washington Post* letter writer suggested that "meatless Mondays" was too timid a response, and proposed foodless Mondays instead. Perhaps this was dry humor. But he offered no indication he didn't mean it.

It was an inauspicious time to make an argument that government was too active; most took for granted that government bore direct responsibility for controlling prices. That was why, on September 7, the president's Cost of Living Council set a new ceiling for domestic crude oil prices, at $4.25 a barrel, about a dollar below the prevailing world price. And it was an inauspicious time, one of economic crisis, to press the notion of handcuffing the government with tax cuts and expenditure ceilings. So Bob Moretti challenged Reagan to a televised debate. Reagan called that a "campaign gimmick" and refused. Moretti said Reagan refused because "he cannot answer the questions we raise as to which

programs will be cut." So he challenged the governor again. And again and again. Five times Reagan said no. He was playing an entirely different game. And playing it very well.

It was true that his statistics did not add up. In fact they contradicted each other—a circumstance he dispatched with the casual blitheness that drove his opponents insane. They claimed his plan would create deficits. He responded it would produce $41.5 billion in *new* revenue over the next decade and a half. But at that, he also stated that the plan's intention was to give the state *less* money to spend.

To those who said it would force cuts in popular programs, he pointed out that it included an emergency fund that would protect them. But then he would say he didn't want to protect government bureaucracies anyway. His critics would scratch their heads—and unveil another brace of statistics. Reagan in turn would respond with moralistic perorations: "When the advocates of bigger and bigger government manage to get their hands on an extra tax dollar or two they hang on like a gila monster until they find some way to spend it." At which his opponents would respond, yes, with many more statistics. But they only ended up looking like pedantic asses. Which was just the game Reagan was playing.

ON ONE THING ALL PARTIES AGREED: PROPOSITION 1 WAS A VEHICLE FOR the governor's national ambitions. Wrote the *National Review* contributor and syndicated columnist John Chamberlain, "If the tax revolt is as real as Reagan thinks, and if individuals are alive to their opportunity to keep special interest politicians from raiding their bank accounts, November 6 in California could mark a genuine turn in history." Said Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown Jr., who was California's secretary of state and son of the man Reagan beat to become governor in 1966, and who hoped to succeed him in 1974, Proposition 1 was "just a vehicle to use to run for President," and "a hoax, pure and simple." Indeed Reagan said he'd like to see constitutional tax limitation at the federal level, and proposed an amendment "requiring that no congressman can introduce a spending measure without at the same time introducing a revenue measure to pay for it."

Reagan's national profile was raised further on September 13 when he was roasted on *The Dean Martin Comedy Hour*. That he hadn't been much of a movie star was the standing joke of the affair. Don Rickles, the bald-headed master of insults, joked about how people couldn't remember how to pronounce his name. "The greatest thing I can say about Governor *Reagan*, or Governor *Ree*-gan, or whatever they

call you . . ." Quipped roast master Dean Martin, "He never made an X-rated movie. All his movies were rated 'M.' You couldn't get in unless you were accompanied by a moron." They were also "so bad they were shown at drive-outs."

The Man of the Hour, crinkle-eyed and square-shouldered, chortled genially. "He laughs at anything!" Rickles thrusted—

"My brother died!"

Rickles mimicked guffaws.

Cut to Reagan—guffawing.

Rickles turned serious: "Black, white, Jew, gentile, we're all working for the same cause."

Thoughtful pause.

"To figure out how you became governor!"

Rickles mocked the guest of honor's national ambitions: "I'll never forget the story about you standing on the White House lawn throwing rocks at the president's window, yelling, 'Dick! Dick!'" Paternally, he turned to him: "Don't beg!" Jack Benny collapsed in convulsions on Reagan's shoulder—and Reagan, amiably, laughed.

Dean Martin pretended to read a congratulatory telegram from *Playgirl* that invited Reagan to pose as a centerfold: "We feel the American public would like to see a politician who has nothing to hide." An older comedian took the podium. He made quite a contrast to comics like George Carlin, Cheech and Chong, and Richard Pryor, who were revolutionizing the field with sewer-mouthed sex-and-drug stuff, who could never abide the evening's formal dress. "How can you aspire to such a high office?" he mock-asked. "You've never even had a good scandal attached to your name. No cheating, no lying, no bugging . . . Who's going to trust a politician like that?"

It got a pretty good laugh, even though it was not true. In 1967 his administration was thrown on its heals when one of Reagan's (male) top aides was caught having sex with a younger (male) aide, and another aide leaked the "homosexuality ring" scandal to a columnist. But that had been forgotten, or perhaps forgiven, now that men having sex with each other was not so scandalous. But the leak itself fit Watergate to a T: it came about because Reagan's press secretary Lyn Nofziger spied on the aide's hotel room to get the incriminating evidence to crush a bureaucratic rival. But no one watching TV knew that. The viewers just saw a genial man on the dais laughing along with Jack Benny and Phyllis Diller.

He took the podium for the traditional final riposte, giving as good as he got.

To Jack Benny: "He's not a tightwad. That's just an act. On my last birthday he gave me a set of encyclopedias." (Pause, perfect timing.) "Paperback."

To Dean Martin: he really was a lot like Reagan. "We both like horses and golf. We both made a lot of movies. The only difference is—"

Pause.

"I knew how to quit!"

On Watergate: "I've sat here watching this whole show, and the best thing I can do for you all is invoke executive privilege."

Perfect pause.

"I refuse to release the tape."

Dean Martin himself didn't get any laughs bigger than that. Reagan then concluded to a standing ovation.

It must have been quite a spectacle for liberals—for instance the state senator in California, George Moscone, who said the governor's recent veto of a bill to increase aid to a half million elderly, blind, and crippled welfare recipients would cause "mass starvation and suicide among those who could no longer afford to live." Reagan was also about to sign a bill restoring the death penalty in California, making capital punishment mandatory for eleven different categories of murders. You might, if you happened to follow the news out of California, have considered him a heartless man. But here he just seemed like a great guy.

THE SHOW PLAYED TO A CORE OF HIS APPEAL. DEAN MARTIN'S TV ROASTS were new that year, and at the same time very old-fashioned. They danced to the music of classic Hollywood, as it was once depicted in magazines with names like *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*, which shaped the notion of the "movie colony" as an intimate little village of folks who were, yes, glamorous, but also, it just so happened, a lot like you and me. Sure, the jokes could be a little racy ("Mark Spitz wasn't always Jewish. But he was swimming in the ocean when he had a run-in with a swordfish"), but that was a part of the fun, too: the thrill of being let in (or seeming to be let in) on these slightly dangerous lives, their inside jokes, their peccadillos. That old Hollywood was gone now—killed by the death of the studio system and the rise of arty directors like Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese and outlaw stars like Marlon Brando and Jane Fonda, enraptured by authenticity and left-wing political engagement and disdainful of mere "entertainment." (Sending up an Indian to accept your Academy Award: hard to imagine Jimmy Stewart doing that.) But fans of the former Hollywood now got to enjoy the good old days in comforting visits: in disaster movies cast to the

gills with all the old familiar stars; in TV variety shows hosted by has-beens like Jackie Gleason—and in the political career of Ronald Reagan, whose appearances beside the likes of Bob Hope and Jimmy Stewart and Martha Raye were part of what made him so pleasant. It was part of what made Reagan's national prospects seem grand. Because nostalgia was becoming a national cult.

Late that summer an unusual film became a surprise hit. Whereas the cool movies these days were rather depressing, *American Graffiti* was light and buoyant. It was set in 1962, and nothing much happened—high school kids in a small California town cruising up and down the local strip, listening to rock and roll, hanging out at Mel's Diner. No sex, hardly even hints, remarkable for a movie about high school kids in summertime; the men were more interested in their eroticized cars. The contrast could not have been stronger to a quintessential New Hollywood picture from two years earlier set in a similar period and milieu: *The Last Picture Show,* which displayed high school students in explicit poolside orgies.

The ads, which explicitly invited the viewer into his own nostalgic reverie, helped: "Where were you in '62?" they asked. A postscript explained what the characters were doing in the present day. One was killed by a drunk driver. Another was missing in action in Vietnam. *American Graffiti* promised to deliver us across the bridge of years to the time before the 1960s storm. So did the new nostalgia magazines, obsessively focused on trivia like Tarzan's costars and the Lone Ranger's wardrobe—and a revived *Saturday Evening Post,* complete with recycled Norman Rockwell covers. *Life* magazine had been out of business since December, but a fat photo compendium *The Best of Life* had a 800,000-copy first printing. Heavy on pictures from the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, it excluded *Life*'s most famous photo: a Vietnamese girl running naked down the street after her school was napalmed by U.S. warplanes.

A restaurant chain called "Shakey's Pizza Parlor and Ye Old Public House" booked Dixieland combos in candy-striped vests and handed out ersatz straw hats made of Styrofoam; another, the Ground Round ("the robust eating & drinking emporium"), promised diners "a happy atmosphere filled with checkered tablecloths . . . stone fire-place, nostalgia-filled jukebox, and free peanuts in the shell for everyone." (You could throw the peanut shells on the floor. There seemed something welcomingly old-fashioned in that.) Comic books were big; at the "Nostalgia '73" convention in Chicago you could buy a copy of the first Superman comic for a thousand dollars, like it was a Picasso or something. "It's a form of escape," one collector told the *Tribune.* "It's just

like you want to recapture the past." (This gentleman so obsessed with recapturing the past was nineteen years old.) Buster Keaton festivals were in, and *Grease,* a Broadway musical about high school in the 1950s.

Fashion was all shaped suits for men and long skirts for women, hats for both—and, of all things, saddle shoes. Bette Midler had a hit with the Andrews Sisters' "Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy," and Herman Wouk's sprawling World War II novel *The Winds of War* was on the fiction best-seller list, as was *The Class of '44.* Another hit movie, *The Sting,* was set in the 1930s—and scored with Scott Joplin rags from the 1890s. Later it was shown in double features with *American Graffiti,* and was still running a year after its release. The patriotic belter Kate Smith was hauled out of mothballs to sing "God Bless America" for the white working-class fans flocking to see the "Broad Street Bullies"—the Philadelphia Flyers hockey club. A Canadian broadcaster named Gordon Sinclair recorded himself reading an editorial praising the United States as "the most generous and least appreciated nation on earth" over the strains of a band playing "America the Beautiful." It became a bestselling record. Some disc jockeys played it every hour on the hour, and columnist David Broder called him "the fellow who's probably had the greatest impact on American opinion these past couple of months," other than Judge John Sirica. The preternaturally warm and supportive Walton clan scrapped through the Great Depression together every week on TV. Everyone wanted to be somewhere else. A somewhere else with clear-cut heroes and villains. Anywhere but the 1970s, which just kept getting less innocent each day.

Late in August, at the annual Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio, a fourteen-year-old was stripped of first prize after officials X-rayed his car and discovered an electromagnet in the nose to pull him out of the starting gate more quickly. Immediately, special pleaders argued he had done no wrong. A publicist at the University of California, Los Angeles reminisced in an op-ed on all the ways he and his buddies used to cheat, and said he couldn't wait to help his son do the same: "Grownups should put their expectations of youngsters in line with reality."

PROXIMATELY, THAT REALITY INCLUDED: IN CHICAGO, THE RESIGNATION of the police superintendent after thirty-five of his officers were convicted of shakedowns; and in Boston, the collapse of the shabbily constructed Tobin Bridge, where a single strike by an errant truck caused two hundred feet of the upper roadway to collapse into the Mystic River. In Florida, a jury acquitted eight activists from Vietnam Veterans Against the War indicted by the Nixon Justice Department for planning

violence at the Republican National Convention in 1972—for the same reason a similar indictment against alleged conspirators in Camden, New Jersey, had been rejected by a jury in May: both plots had been instigated by FBI agent provocateurs. The acquittal was quietly devastating to the moral excuses of Watergate malefactors like James McCord, who claimed in his Ervin Committee testimony that reports of planned violence at that convention were the reason they'd been willing to break the law for Richard Nixon.

A reader wrote to the *Los Angeles Times:* "Tell the students that on their way home they should be exceptionally careful about strangers sitting around in cars. Students should be told not to accept money, rides, or presents from strangers." That same day, elsewhere in the paper, you could learn about plans to cut the municipal workweek to four days to help unclog the city's dystopian traffic congestion, and that in Sacramento lawmen pondered whether to abandon the state capitol after a study revealed the building might collapse in the event of even a minor earthquake or fire. It was easy to feel that civilization was falling apart.

Meanwhile in Sacramento, the governor was fighting for Proposition 1 so hard he even managed to find a way to acknowledge something bad might have happened at the White House: the way his opponents distorted statistics, he said, was "a little bit like Watergate." At utterances like these, opponents were still throwing up their hands. If Reagan wanted to cut taxes and spending, Jerry Brown pointed out, why had he raised both in his previous seven years as governor, despite having a line-item veto? (He had even authorized a surprise tax increase for the Los Angeles school district two weeks after his initiative made the ballot.) "How can a magic formula, written by invisible lawyers, do what Ronald Reagan has been unwilling or unable to do?"

And indeed, if government employees were such money-sucking monsters, why did the state budget have a surplus in the first place?

Reagan would say something like "The real issue is that these people believe the government should be taking more taxes from the people." Then his aides would have to concede the point that actually no tax increases were expected for years. Their boss would point to "some of this country's most distinguished economists," who'd signed off on the plan because they believed spiraling taxes would create "the biggest economic bellyache America has ever known unless we do something about it." Critics would point out that the only economists saying this were right-wing ones who despised taxes as such. And that writing intricate tax policy into a constitutional amendment that could not be adjusted without further constitutional amendments turned the state's governing charter into a laboratory experiment, straitjacketing its flexibility to respond to crises.

He told a cheering crowd at the Disneyland Hotel: "What they mean by 'flexibility' is the unlimited ability to get into your pockets." And made yet more moralistic perorations: "Have we really forgotten what the Constitution is for? It is not designed to protect government from the people; it is to protect the people against government. It is not a document in which government tells the people what they can do. It is a contract by which the people tell the government what we, the people, will permit government to do."

The only consistency in his story was the casting. There were the good guys: anyone fighting to cut taxes. And the bad: the government bureaucrats after your hard-earned cash. As a morality tale, it was compelling. The public opinion expert Samuel Lubell had a new book out in which he reported his interviews around the country with middle-class Americans. "Every use of government was becoming a tax issue," he observed. "Welfare brought protests that 'people on relief are crushing the middle class.'"

But whether Reagan could convince people that Proposition 1 wouldn't also crush the middle class was still an open question. Moretti said that if Proposition 1 passed, "by the time the walls come crashing down around whoever the next governor of this state is," Reagan would "be campaigning in Mississippi someplace, saying, 'I don't understand the problems they're having out there; when I was in charge, things ran smoothly.'" He published an op-ed eviscerating Reagan's key claims—especially his favorite claim, that state, federal, and local taxes ate up 44.7 percent of the average person's income and would increase to a whopping 54 and maybe even 67 percent. That was "sheer deception," Moretti said, citing the estimate of the Tax Foundation—another respected outfit no one had thought to call ideological before—that the tax burden was actually 32.7 percent, and to reach the more extravagant figures "the governor included receipts to government which are not taxes," like private donations to the University of California, college bookstore revenues, U.S. postal receipts, sale of agricultural products by the federal government, and admissions to college athletic events. He also double-counted many of the government's receipts.

On the merits, it was a devastating rebuttal. But perhaps not devastating enough. As the fall weather turned crisp, the Las Vegas oddsmaker Jimmy the Greek concluded that, all in all, Proposition 1 had a 3-to-1 chance of passage.

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ON SEPTEMBER 26 THE ERVIN COMMITTEE SQUEEZED IN ITS LAST WITNESS whose testimony was televised live before folding up its green table. In the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* the headline introducing him read "NIXON WRITER BACKS POLITICAL SPYING TACTICS." The Nixon writer in question was Patrick J. Buchanan, and in addition to writing speeches, his job had been preparing Nixon's summaries each morning of what was in the papers and newscasts—an angry daily soupçon of liberal perfidy, media bias, and, wherever possible, news from the heartland of ordinary Americans who loved the person Buchanan affectionately called the "Old Man" as much as he did. Later, the American people would learn that Pat Buchanan had advised the president to build a bonfire on the White House lawn and burn the tapes. His testimony was the first time a witness provided a thoroughgoing strategic overview of what all the 1972 dirty tricks that had become known as "Watergate" were intended to accomplish: sabotaging all the other Democratic candidates in order to leave George McGovern, the field's weakest link, as the last man standing, and in the process to turn the Democratic Party into a nest of recrimination and distrust.

But first, leading up to Buchanan's appearance, candid memos he had written were leaked: for instance, advice to "cut the Democratic Party and country in half," as he put it in 1971, to end up with "by far the larger half." And his question, also in 1971, not long before Edmund Muskie's presidential run collapsed following his emotional reaction to attacks on his wife, "Who should we get to poke the sharp stick into his cage to bring Muskie howling forth?" And his gloating, in April 1972, that "[o]ur primary objective, to prevent Senator Muskie from sweeping the early primaries, locking up the convention in April and uniting the Democratic party behind him for the fall, has been achieved. The likelihood—great three months ago—that the Democratic Convention could become a dignified coronation ceremony for a centrist candidate who could lead a united party into the election—is now remote." Watergate buffs insisted this proved that Nixon had stolen the 1972 election.

In his opening statement, Buchanan went on the offensive. He accused the leakers of a "covert campaign of vilification" against him, and claimed he had never recommended "that the reelection committee infiltrate the campaigns of our opposition." And that he had known nothing of "any ongoing campaign of political sabotage."

"The election of 1972 was not stolen!" he concluded. It had been won on "the quality and character of our candidate."

Then he spent the next hours boasting of how the Nixon team had

infiltrated the campaigns of the opposition and carried out an ongoing campaign of political sabotage. It was an extraordinary performance.

He proudly admitted to arranging fake demonstrations against Democratic candidates; setting up fake Democratic campaign committees; drumming up fake enthusiasm for the black female candidate Shirley Chisholm; sending insulting letters to Democratic candidates, ostensibly from other Democratic candidates; personally writing ads ostensibly written by independent groups; planting letters to editors ostensibly written by private citizens. ("When will you people realize that he was elected President and he is entitled to the respect of that office no matter what you people think of him?" read one.) Then he would ask what all the fuss was about: "I've ghosted speeches for Presidents, for Vice Presidents, senators, Republican chairman. I have ghosted letters to editors.... What is illicit about ghosting an ad in which individuals are going to put their names on them?"

Documents pointed to a note from Colson to Haldeman to organize a White House public relations campaign attacking CBS; one from Magruder to "get independent station owners to write NBC saying they should remove [anchorman Chet] Huntley now"; others on how to create "an inhibiting effect on the networks" by exploiting "their professed concern with achieving balance"—for instance by having the Republican National Committee chair charge "that there is a political conspiracy in the media to attack this Administration.... Utilize the antitrust division to investigate various media.... Utilize the Internal Revenue Service.... Just the threat of an IRS investigation will turn their approach." All the sorts of things Buchanan was defending as normal politics—somehow simultaneously with a smile and a sneer, even admitting to turning down the assignment to run the Plumbers, not because it was "something that was illicit or unethical or wrong," but because he thought it was bad strategy.

The gobsmacked committee began the grilling. "Turn to tab 16 of your July 28, 1971, memo," Sam Dash asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Turn to page five."

Dash read: "We would like to utilize Ron Walker's resources where possible to handle some close-in operations, pickets and the like, and candidate visits to various cities." He asked Buchanan what that meant. The speechwriter with the slicked-back hair answered, "If you have at the airport a group of individuals with a sign that they throw up at the right moment, 'This is Nixon country,' for example, you are liable to

get an Associated Press photograph with Senator Muskie with the sign, which is, we feel, advantageous."

Dash came back: "This would be to give the appearance of a demonstration against the candidate."

Which was where the witness was supposed to get defensive. That was what every other witness had done. Instead, Buchanan took it as an opportunity to boast some more, musing that "if Senator Muskie were having difficulty with some particular questions, something like that, you could draft the questions and get the local Republicans there to put them on the press bus, or to hand out their fliers at the Muskie rally, put them on the seats of chairs."

Dash followed up by reading a memo in which Buchanan recommended joining a club for top-dollar Democratic donors: "This would give us many advantages in keeping track of Democratic contenders and their strategy."

Dash didn't even have time to ask a question.

"Yes, sir, that idea is taken out of Larry O'Brien's campaign book that it is a good thing for Democrats to get on the mailing list for all Republican materials they find." Spying on the opposing camp was "a common thing done in American campaigns."

Young Pat Buchanan could turn the proposition that two wrongs made a right—especially if the second wrong was triple the size of the first—into a sublime sort of political poetry. The *New York Times* quoted a White House insider who said it was "the only day of hearings I've really enjoyed." The Nixon-friendly newspaper *Sun* of Durham, North Carolina, hosannaed "A NEW KIND OF WATERGATE WITNESS": "Billed as an expert on 'dirty tricks,' Mr. Buchanan played the dirtiest trick of them all on the committee members by taking the wind out of their inquisitorial sails and making them and their counsel look like a bunch of confused nitpickers."

The committee's caucus of suspicion did tear into Buchanan's recommendations for defeating the influence of liberal tax-exempt foundations like the Ford Foundation, which was promoting allegedly nefarious activities like registering voters in Negro areas. The foundations, Buchanan returned, affected to be serving some neutral public good but were actually "quasi-political operations"—which was why he promoted right-wing quasi-political foundations to take them on. He called the left-wing think tank the Institute for Policy Studies an "arm" of Ford, and claimed it funded one of the most scabrous underground newspapers, the *Quicksilver Times*, in its plans to disrupt the 1972 Republican convention. The *New York Times*, in an editorial called

"Anatomy of a Smear," pointed out that the Institute for Policy Studies had never given a penny to the *Quicksilver Times*.

But by the time Buchanan said that, the mood of the proceedings had shifted: he charmed the panel to his side, and most of the panelists ended up praising him as the best witness they had called. Senator Weicker even, meekly, thanked him. The *Times* was amazed to find the senators "too enthralled by Mr. Buchanan's joviality to question his arrogant insistence that even the most outrageous election abuses perpetrated by the President's surrogates were nothing more than politics as usual."

But then again, maybe the *Times* was guilty of the same thing. The next week it gave him space to respond, in an op-ed titled "Anatomy of a Lynching Syndrome." And in fact, within media circles, the brazen way Buchanan played the game had been enjoyed as a guilty pleasure. Columnist Jules Witcover, for instance, penned a fulsome profile dubbing him a "man of spirit." We were now "in a kind of movie-set society," a correspondent from the suspicious circles wrote the *Times* about the embrace of Buchanan. "In considering the damage Watergate has done to so many of our accepted values, perhaps the one that has been most dangerously undermined is face value—that reality is what we perceive it to be." Maybe this young man had a future.

CHAPTER NINE

The Year Without Christmas Lights

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 1973, THE EVENING NEWS REMINDED AMERICANS THAT their country was still so much saner and safer than most of the rest of the world. In the South American nation of Chile, warplanes began strafing radio stations and newspapers. Images arrived of people scattering in fear ahead of tanks in the streets. Fearsome generals in coats with starred epaulets ordered President Salvador Allende, the world's only elected Marxist leader, to step down. A military communiqué: "The armed forces and the body of carabineros are united in their historic and responsible mission of fighting to liberate Chile from the Marxist yoke. Signed, General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, Commander-in-Chief of the Army."

Pinochet's coup came the day before a planned national referendum scheduled by Allende, a man as fastidiously obsessed with his nation's constitution as Sam Ervin was about his, to ratify or reject his government. But the military chose not to chance democracy. Instead they rounded up thousands and deposited them in the national stadium, some marked for execution. In the streets of Santiago, loudspeakers barked out commands: "All people resisting the new government will pay the price." For at least seventy-five people, in the first three weeks, the price was execution by Pinochet's Caravana de la Muerte—the "Caravan of Death." One bullet-riddled body, belonging to the popular, pacifist singer Víctor Jara, was found dumped in a Santiago backstreet, his hands broken and his wrists cracked.

The ousted president, refusing to yield, made his way to the parliament for one last speech. Then he fell back to the presidential palace, now strafed by planes and pummeled by tanks, forty civil servants still pinned inside. The majestic building nearly burned to the ground. "Oh, baby!" a CBS Radio correspondent intoned on the air with an intake of breath as machine-gun volleys sounded. "We're in the wrong place.... We are pinned down on a corner . . . looking at a policeman with an automatic rifle.... What the hell am I doing *here*?"

And then, three weeks later, the evening news had once more reminded Americans of how terrifying the world so blessedly far beyond our borders could be. With canny savagery, Egypt and Syria launched a simultaneous attack on Israel at the one time the entire nation shut down: Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. Eight hundred tanks of Soviet manufacture rolled over the Suez Canal on pontoon bridges. Seventy thousand troops, some paddling rubber boats, attacked in wave after wave. High-tech Soviet surface-to-air missiles crushed the supposedly unbeatable Israeli air defenses, which in 1967 had wiped out the Egyptian Air Force before they could leave the ground in only two hours, leaving ground troops naked and exposed. New missiles, manned by highly trained infantry, not the hapless amateurs Israel had faced in the 1956 and 1967 wars, began crushing the Israeli tank corps, also supposedly undefeatable. Israel's defense minister declared it "the start of all-out war again"—the fourth in the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob since the modern state of Israel was declared twenty-five years earlier. Sheikh Amid Fahan, Egypt's highest religious authority, declared it a "jihad"—a holy war—and called on every Muslim to join the battle against "the enemies of Allah." Iraq and Tunisia immediately promised to do so. Egypt's foreign minister said there could be no peace while Israel occupied Palestinian lands; Israel's foreign minister said occupation would continue until there was peace.

BACK HOME, A UFO SCARE WAS AFOOT: TWO MEN FROM PASCAGOULA, Mississippi, reported a cigar-shaped vessel with flashing blue lights pulled them up in its tractor beam; there claw-handed beasts paralyzed them and performed a medical examination. Within weeks Gallup reported 51 percent of Americans thought extraterrestrial visitations were real. Fifteen million said they'd seen one themselves. The Pascagoula witness showed up on *The Dick Cavett Show*.

It was around this time that *Time* put drug mystic Carlos Castaneda on the cover, and three books battled it out on the paperback bestseller list: *The Gods from Outer Space* and *Chariots of the Gods*, both by Erich von Däniken, which proposed "ancient aliens" had built monuments like the Pyramids, Stonehenge, and the sculptures on Easter Island; and *Bermuda Triangle*, which wondered whether the lost city of Atlantis was responsible for the supposedly mysterious disappearances there. You could learn about such theories at an exhibit in Montreal, at the municipal fairgrounds that once hosted Expo '67—or at the downtown branch of State Savings Mutual Bank on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, where before opening an account you could "talk to ex-

perts on ESP, hypnosis, bio-feedback, shape energy, plant sensitivity, and acupuncture, hosted by Leah Caverhill of the National Academy of Applied Awareness," the "lady who predicted the Watergate scandal a year before it happened. Enter a room-size energy pyramid for an actual demonstration." Learn "extraordinary facts about UFO's, astrology, numerology, graphology, palmistry, tarot, and the comet Kohoutek. . . . Come with an open mind." It was advertised alongside the bank's seminars on tax law.

In that same city, a neuropsychologist named Thelma Moss claimed that a technique known as "Kirlian photography," which captured the electrical coronal discharges around objects, could reflect the physical and emotional states of living subjects, perhaps to diagnose illnesses. Perhaps that sounded absurd. But if it were all merely hokum, why would UCLA have let Dr. Moss open a laboratory that studied extrasensory perception, poltergeists, and telepathy under the auspices of the great university's Neuropsychiatric Institute, and why would the journal *Behavioral Neuropsychiatry* (vol. 6, nos. 1–12, pp. 71–80) have published a paper of which she was a coauthor: "A Laboratory Investigation of Telepathy: The Study of a Psychic"?

On *The Tonight Show*, an Israeli "paranormalist" named Uri Geller tried and failed to demonstrate his signature claim—that he could bend metal spoons with his mind—but then, as he explained to host Johnny Carson, he had simply not felt "strong" that particular night; and after all in the prestigious British scientific journal *Nature*, two physicists claimed results affirming that Geller may indeed "have the ability to receive and send information in a way other than by the known normal senses." The editors did acknowledge that several referees found the experiment "weak in design and presentation"—but then again, might not those reviewers be entrapped within the same sort of limited "linear" paradigms of thinking it was the work of savants like Geller and Moss to transcend? Once upon a time "the occult" had been the redoubt of rubes. Now, in a world where the usual sources of authority no longer had answers for anything, the weird stuff was getting more serious consideration.

A cheap paperback soon came to market. *Predictions for 1974* starred a panoply of psychics with names like "Countess Amy" and "Aquarius." It featured, alongside news-to-come about traffic accidents ("A submarine and a UFO will collide off the Aleutian Islands"), the occult ("reincarnation will be espoused by more and more young people as a valid explanation for the dislocations in modern society"), celebrities ("Dean Martin may have a health problem and definitely should be careful of his nose"), and celebrities and the occult ("A youthful female actress of sudden fame will publicly announce that she used witchcraft to obtain her current level of success and happiness"), prediction after prediction about how the world would collapse. That was what the future looked like now. Deaths from record bitter cold. Deaths from a "nerve gas leak" off the coast of Florida. A 1929-style stock market collapse. A declaration of bankruptcy by New York City—"the first tangible sign of the collapse of our entire civilization." Single people banned from buying big cars. Locusts and floods, "like the plagues of Egypt," worldwide droughts, rising sea levels "inundating all coastal areas throughout the world." Rationing of every staple, urban blackouts, riots, martial law. "Disaster will hit one of New York's skyscraper landmark buildings." "Man is an endangered species," as one soothsayer put it—and he wasn't even the most morose of the lot.

A map of the dreads of a nation—just when, as the autumn leaves began to fall, America's imagined safe distance from the chaos abroad crumbled, and the sort of things that seemed once to happen only in banana republics visited us here at home.

OCTOBER WAS RUNG IN WITH BIBLICAL PROPHECIES FROM AN ASSISTANT secretary of the interior. "With anything less than the best of luck," Stephen Wakefield announced, "we shall probably face shortages of heating oil, propane, and diesel fuel this winter. . . . I am talking about men without jobs, homes without heat, children without schools."

In Los Angeles the Department of Water and Power predicted a 35 percent energy shortage by April. This forecast came the day after the president's Cost of Living Council set a new ceiling on the price of domestic crude; the major oil companies responded by raising the prices they charged their affiliate service stations by about a penny a gallon. In San Francisco three thousand service stations shut down for three days in protest: street corners become ghost towns in the beautiful City by the Bay.

Warnings that such things might soon come to pass had been frequent that summer. They were ignored. No one trusted government warnings. No one trusted much of anything. On October 2, a committee choosing an Episcopalian bishop used slips of paper rather than voting aloud: "With Watergate," a bishop explained, "our committee was so concerned that our meeting place might be bugged that we never mentioned any of the candidates' names."

That same week Vice President Spiro Agnew spoke before the annual conclave of the National Federation of Republican Women in Los

Angeles. He proclaimed his innocence, promising, "I will not resign if indicted."

Two weeks later, on October 10, he resigned, after being indicted.

He had pleaded nolo contendere—"the full equivalent to a guilty plea," the judge explained—to a single reduced charge of income tax evasion. He received a three-year suspended sentence and a ten-thousand-dollar fine, less than what the prosecution said he owed the IRS in taxes for his graft, and less than what he had taken in an envelope from a single Maryland building contractor. Pursuant to his deal with prosecutors, he resigned effective immediately. Then he gave a speech blaming his fall on the "new post-Watergate morality"—referring to the sins of the prosecutors, not his own.

There followed the usual liberal protestations that this was just to be expected from the "law-and-order" hustlers in Richard Nixon's employ, and the usual right-wing ones that since Agnew was a conservative the Establishment hated, he had to have been framed. More interesting, however, was a new note: scales falling from eyes. In Palm Springs, where Agnew golfed with Sinatra, a wealthy resident explained how Agnew had "commanded our respect and trust as no one in government has for so many years." With "the Watergate incident, we would not believe the news media and closed our eyes to the truth." Now, however, he realized "it would be catastrophic if all the politicians in Washington were thoroughly investigated. For, we may not have a government."

Agnew's plea deal opened the floodgates of a corrosive cynicism. The president had refused to entertain the idea of amnesty for draft resisters; but Agnew had been afforded amnesty all but automatically. So Gordon Strachan, the young Haldeman aide who earned laughs for warning young idealists away from Washington, had been proved wrong; as one *Los Angeles Times* letter writer put it: young people *should* go into public service. Then they would have "the privilege of committing felonies." An inmate wrote from Los Angeles County Jail: "My horrendous crime of plain drunk has drawn me 120 days"; if only his crime was political he'd be free to walk the streets. Another wrote that the sixty days he got for breaking a window during a strike was "a clear reminder that, as Thrasymachus says in Plato's *Republic*, justice is whatever those in power say it is, and whatever is to their advantage." Someone nominated the "Theme from *Shaft*" as the new national anthem.

On October 14 the *New York Times* reported a poll demonstrating a 12 percentage point increase in public cynicism regarding government. Two professors reported on their annual canvass of graduate students entering the University of Michigan's Institute for Public Policy Studies.

A year earlier, 12 percent had agreed that "often those who enter politics think more about their own welfare or that of their party than about the welfare of the citizens." This year the figure had jumped to 94 percent.

Children were cynical, too: whereas kids used to collect images of sports heroes they now hoarded "Wacky Packages," a twelve-year-old middle finger collectively extended at consumer capitalism. The product had bombed when the Topps Chewing Gum company tried it out in 1967. Now, though, the time was ripe. "Cap'n Crunch" became "Cap'n Crud." "Ultra Bright" was "Ultra Blight." "Post Alphabits" became "Pest Awful Bits" ("FREE 24 Vol. Set Encyclopedia Britannica in Every Box!"). "Rice A Phony." "Blunder Bread." They were subversive in form, too, not just content: not cards, but stickers—the adolescent equivalent of subway graffiti. A fifth-grade teacher told *New York* magazine it had taken half a day to pry them off desks at the end of the school year.

New York also noted the increasingly political turn of *Mad* magazine—2.4 million copies sold a month, and no ads or branded merchandising: kids' one redoubt of purity in a cruddy, overcommercialized world. In one recent gag, the "Corporate Ecologist of the Year" explained how his company was spending million of dollars responding to pollution: "on advertising—to clean up the corporate image." "Starchie Bunker" got a visit from an "old World War II buddy," Adolf Hitler, then CBS gave Hitler a spin-off sitcom. *New York*'s distinguished political correspondent Richard Reeves wrote that *Mad* was turning his son into a smart-ass. It did him proud: "The kid can spot the sham piling up all around him." Another parent told Reeves, "I think it made her secure in being skeptical. . . . It's really a shortcut to a kind of sanity-preserving sophistication." *Mad*'s publisher chimed in: "We all need some cynicism." Reeves asked a seven-year-old what Wacky Packages' appeal was. He said, "I think they're bringing out the truth."

The brat named the spirit of the age. Everything was fraudulent. America making the world safe for democracy? CBS Radio now reported from Chile on suspicions that the United States had instigated the coup there. The anchor clarified: "Actually, no evidence has yet been uncovered that Washington had any direct responsibility for the events in Santiago"—though such was the national atmosphere of suspicion that they reported on the rumor anyway.

JUST TWO DAYS AFTER AGNEW'S RESIGNATION THE WHITE HOUSE HONored the new Twenty-fifth Amendment of Sam Ervin's favorite document, which sharpened the rules for presidential succession, and

nominated a new vice president: Gerald Ford, the House minority leader. Nixon called it "a new beginning for America." The *Washington Post*'s cartoonist found the choice so unlikely he depicted the new veep as a stunned game show winner—"wait, that's not all—a complete set of Secret Service Men, plus three years, expenses paid in the second highest office in the land!" The *Chicago Daily News*' Mike Royko said it was like something out of a Woody Allen script—So you want to become vice president?

"First, find safe district and keep getting elected."

"Don't die, so you can pile up a lot of seniority."

"Stay in the mainstream of your party, even when it does something dumb."

And finally: "Don't make enemies."

Conservatives had wanted Reagan, and he seemed like a contender. But Reagan *had* made enemies. Nixon needed someone anodyne, who could quickly get confirmed by Congress, and Ford was a man of Congress—thirteen terms representing little Grand Rapids, Michigan, since his first election in 1948, which had also been his last competitive election. Apparently *because* he was mediocre, Ford was the one—the proverbial heartbeat away.

Or maybe an impeachment away. It had long been a Washington joke: the oafish Spiro Agnew was Nixon's "impeachment insurance." Nixon had joked about it himself in the Oval Office: "What the hell, you know. People say impeach the President. Well, then they get Agnew!" Now the insurance policy had expired. William Rusher, publisher of *National Review* and not a bad political operative himself, wrote, "We've demonstrated we can replace a Vice President, so I expect we could replace a President." Nixon named Ford on the same day the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that the president "is not above the law's command" and would have to turn over the seven tapes Judge Sirica had asked for, unless he appealed to the Supreme Court, which the judge gave the president until October 19 to do.

The only question then was what he would do if the Supreme Court ruled against him. Which was an ominous question indeed. J. Anthony Lukas of the *New York Times* called it a potential "constitutional apocalypse."

On August 7 Sirica had demanded from the president's representatives an explanation as to why they refused to follow a court order. Nixon's lawyer Charles Alan Wright responded with a crystalline argument wrapped in the highest possible principle: the demand to X-ray the innards of Oval Office deliberation was "a serious threat to the nature of the presidency as it was created by the Constitution, as it has been sustained for 184 years, and as it exists today," and would alter "the total structure of the government." In an oral argument he raised the specter of judicial anarchy: there were more than four hundred federal district judges in the United States, each with a lifetime appointment. Could America maintain a democracy once each and every one of them was allowed to compel presidents to cough up private papers?

Then there was the problem of precedent: no president, and no department of the government, had ever been held in contempt by either the courts or Congress for "refusing to produce information" that "the President has determined must be withheld in the public interest"—and the public interest, the president had determined, would be eviscerated unless every future president could "expect candid and frank advice from his underlings." Thus the president was acting, Wright argued, to faithfully execute the laws—"ultimately to protect the right of the American people to informed and vigorous advice for their President."

Cue "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Then cue ominous clouds. Wright ended with a passively aggressive hint: "Whether a decision adverse to the President could be enforced is a question."

On August 29, Judge Sirica handed down his first decision regarding the tapes, establishing what he thought was a middle ground—the president could turn them over for Sirica's inspection; Sirica would vet them for privacy and national security concerns. He added a riposte to Wright's menacing threat: "That the court has not the physical power to enforce its order to the President is immaterial to a resolution of the issue." Then came an ominous rumble from San Clemente: the president was considering an appeal—but was also looking into "how otherwise to sustain" his legal position. At a September 5 press conference, asked what that meant, Nixon invoked President Lincoln—who "indicated several times during his Presidency that he would move in the national interest in a way that many thought was perhaps in violation of the law." Then Nixon insisted it would not be appropriate to explain further what he meant, "until we go through the appellate procedure."

That procedure was now almost completed. There was only the Supreme Court to go. And if the president defied the highest court in the land, Ted Kennedy said on the floor of the Senate, "It would be Chile, really, without the bloodshed." Pinochet, after all, knew enough to claim he was defending *his* nation's constitution, too.

But everyone knew that could not happen here.

ON OCTOBER 14, AMERICANS LEARNED THAT THE MIDDLE EAST WAR WAS not so far away after all: an American airlift was on its way to Israel, which exceeded in a couple of weeks the amount of supplies ferried to Berlin in 1948 over eleven months.

The decision had been made five days earlier. The State Department presumed Israel would regain its footing and quickly battle its way back to the status quo ante, and a peace process could begin. Instead, Israeli diplomats passed word to Henry Kissinger that Israel continued to suffer "staggering and totally unexpected" reverses—forty-nine downed warplanes, five hundred disabled tanks. The Soviet Union was resupplying Egypt and Syria by air. Prime Minister Golda Meir sent an emissary to the White House, who warned the president that if the other Arab nations smelled Israel's panic they would unite militarily to end the Jewish state once and for all. The decision: load American cargo planes to the gills with the most modern tanks and planes in America's arsenal—along with, Kissinger promised Israel's ambassador, "assurances that you will have replacements."

Ronald Reagan helped make the decision. The California governor received regular security briefings from Kissinger; the White House, it turned out, was a little obsessed with Reagan. On one level it thought him a clown: A gossip item in June about John Ehrlichman's empty family home, up for sale Great Falls, Virginia (one house hunter caused consternation when he picked up the phone line that still led directly to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue), revealed a poster of Reagan in a cowboy outfit in the house's rec room, covered over with a "Nixon's the One" sign. And in that 1971 Oval Office conversation about Reagan, Nixon worried, "With a Reagan in here, you could damn well almost get yourself in a nuclear war." Kissinger agreed: "He has no judgment." Be that as it may, Kissinger still solicited him for advice on the extraordinarily delicate matter of how to frame an Israeli resupply operation that if handled incorrectly could lead to a military confrontation with the Soviet Union. Reagan suggested: "Why don't you say you will replace all the aircraft the Arabs claim they have shot down?"

That was brilliant. Since the Arabs were wildly exaggerating their success, presenting them with a Hobson's choice—saying nothing or facing international humiliation—was perfect. Reagan's interpersonal intelligence was something to behold. Which was why the White House was obsessed with him in the first place. Kissinger found himself wishing he had Reagan on his State Department staff.

There was another motivation for America doing what it could

to help Israel win: petroleum. Nixon and Kissinger hoped the Arabs would realize that the only way to obtain their strategic objectives was by cooperating with the United States. But the petroleum industry interpreted the situation in the opposite way. Aramco, the consortium of international petroleum companies operating in the Middle East, had written to the president on October 12 warning that the resupply would provoke a cutback from Saudi Arabia. So did the British ambassador to the United States, who asked Henry Kissinger, "What will be your posture when the Arabs start screaming 'oil' at you?"

"Defiance," the secretary of state replied.

Defiance, however, soon backfired, in the most terrifying way.

Nixon had never taken seriously the idea that Arab states could or would use oil as a weapon. In fact, Nixon had never taken the oil problem seriously at all. "Concentrate on the big game," he said to his treasury secretary, George Shultz, when warned about the geopolitical consequences of possible shortages the previous March; he called such worries "escapist." West German chancellor Willy Brandt warned him two months later of the potential for an oil embargo. Nixon poohpoohed him: There were "too many companies and nations fighting each other" for any embargo to work. Four weeks later it was French president Georges Pompidou's turn to sound the alarm. Nixon told him to stop worrying about irrelevant Third World nations: "The five fingers," he said—"a strong Europe, a strong U.S., Russia, China, and for the future, Japan"—were the world economy's fist. "The rest do not matter." National Security Council and State Department aides warned Kissinger, too. His response was downright hysterical: "Don't talk to me about barrels of oil. They might as well [be] bottles of Coca-Cola. I don't understand!"

Men like these did not see that the world was shifting beneath their feet. The astonishing cheapness of energy, the unacknowledged linchpin of America's extraordinary postwar growth, had been a function of a one-time world glut in production—from 8.7 million barrels a day in 1948 to 42 million in 1972. In a globalizing world America's share of those barrels, once 64 percent, was now 22 percent—even as Europe's postwar demand had increased fifteenfold, Japan's 137-fold. Regulatory bodies like the Texas Railroad Commission deliberately induced scarcity to keep prices up, even as environmental concerns introduced new bottlenecks in supply: a spectacular 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara scotched offshore drilling; auto emissions standards added about 300,000 barrels a day to U.S. demand; refineries became harder to build; environmentalists stymied a planned pipeline to move oil discovered in Alaska's

Prudhoe Bay. Cities converted their dirty coal-burning power plants to cleaner ones burning oil, further squeezing supply; new synthetic fabrics and petrochemicals compounded the addiction. In just the short window between 1970 and 1973, America's oil imports, once all but nonexistent, doubled. Now 29 percent came from abroad—the lion's share from Middle East nations that mostly despised the United States.

Fifteen years earlier Nikita Khrushchev had called the divided city of Berlin "the testicles of the West," which he need only squeeze to make the United States scream. Now that pressure point was oil. "We are in a position to dictate prices," Saudi Arabia's oil minister, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, informed the world in April, "and we are going to be very rich."

They were also, apparently, determined to dictate politics. "America's continued support of Zionism against the Arabs makes it extremely difficult for us to continue to supply the United States with oil," said Saudi Arabia's king. Fortunate that the Middle East producers seemed such a sad-sack sort of crew. Yes, the Arabs had their oil cartel, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC. Together its eleven members produced more than 80 percent of the world's exported oil. They had tried to coordinate a boycott during the 1967 war. It failed miserably—for all it took to disintegrate any boycott was for one nation to seize a quick financial windfall as the region's only supplier of oil. The president was asked at his September 5 press conference about "threats from the Arab countries to use oil as a club to force a change in our Middle East policy"—and the pooh-poohing he'd privately given the likes of Shultz and Pompidou now was on the record: "Oil without a market," he said, "as Mr. Mossadegh learned many, many years ago, does not do a country much good." A mafia-style threat: Mohammad Mossadegh had been the left-wing president of Iran. When he'd expropriated British Petroleum's oil fields in 1953, he found himself the victim of a CIA-sponsored coup. And also Economics 101: a state whose economy was based on oil couldn't simply stop selling oil to the world's richest country—unless it wanted to stop having an economy.

He apparently had not noticed what Libya's charismatic, ambitious strongman Colonel Muammar Gadhafi, said when he'd expropriated the holdings of Occidental Petroleum in 1971: "People who have lived without oil for 5,000 years can live without it again for a few years in order to attain their legitimate rights." And what with the new War Powers Act, and America's anxiety about getting into "another Vietnam," American saber rattling did not resound like it used to.

In the Sinai Desert, on October 14 and 15, Israel's American tanks

bulled past Egypt's Soviet ones, ferried across the Suez Canal to crush the surface-to-air missile batteries. On October 16, the first Israeli troops poured into Egyptian territory, President Anwar Sadat asked the Soviet Union to convene the United Nations to seek a cease-fire—and the Arab states in OPEC declared themselves the world economy's new fist, unilaterally raising their price for crude oil from $3.00 to $5.11 per barrel. The next day they announced they would sell no oil to the United States, and that until Israel withdrew from occupied Palestinian territories, they would reduce production altogether by 5 percent a month.

Nixon, unimpressed, asked Congress for $2.2 billion to pay for continued resupply of Israel. On Saturday, October 20, the fighting entered its fifteenth day and a CBS reporter asked Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger about the soldiers being sent to Israeli airports to help unload American matériel: "Could this become another Vietnam? . . . Mr. Secretary, isn't there a danger, in sending these dozens of American military personnel to Israel, that they for some reason might be captured and then it would be necessary to send more U.S. personnel to rescue them?"

Then the confrontation back home took an astonishing turn.

ARCHIBALD COX WAS EVERYTHING RICHARD NIXON HATED: A know-it-all Kennedy-loving Harvard professor. At every opportunity in the tapes case, with moralistic hauteur, Cox described the president's obduracy as just the sort of thing one would expect from a crook with a guilty conscience. His argument was that the tapes should simply be turned over to himself and the grand jury, with no intervening review by any judge; his briefs dismissed "executive privilege" concerns as irrelevant "where there is reason to believe that the deliberations may have involved criminal conduct." He also kneecapped the argument that the president was protecting the effectiveness of future presidents; Cox pointed out that "the interest in free discussion by government officials cannot outweigh the interest in the integrity of the government itself." Indeed he eviscerated any notion that principle had anything to do with the president's arguments at all. Nixon claimed that what would collapse all future expectations of Oval Office privacy was the very act of anyone, ever, at any time listening to these conversations. But, noted Cox, hadn't Bob Haldeman, in his opening statement to the Ervin Committee, revealed that the president had loaned him tapes of Oval Office conversations? Haldeman had told the committee, claiming the tape recorder as his silent witness, that it was true that the president told Dean they could raise a million dollars to pay off the burglars—and that the

president had added, "but that would be wrong." (TAPES CLEAR NIXON–HALDEMAN, the headlines had read.) Pointed out Cox: "Not even a President can be allowed to select some accounts of a conversation for public disclosure and then to frustrate further grand jury inquires [*sic*] by withholding the best evidence of what actually took place." The point was both devastating and humiliating.

After making that argument, Cox left Judge Sirica's chambers wondering why Nixon, if he wasn't involved, wouldn't just turn over the tapes to prove himself innocent. Publicly, he said, "There is no reason to believe that respondent"—that is, Richard Nixon—"would disregard a final binding order fixing legal responsibility." Even *Richard Nixon* would never summon men at arms to assert his authority over another branch of the government. That would be dictatorship. That would be unimaginable.

On the morning of Saturday, October 20, John Dean's appearance in Sirica's courtroom to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice and of defrauding the United States was knocked off the front page by news that the president would be skipping his appointed showdown with the Supreme Court. In a late-night secret Oval Office meeting, said the news, Howard Baker and Sam Ervin had arrived at a compromise: instead of Judge Sirica getting to listen to tapes he would read a summary prepared by the president. "The authenticity of this summary," the president explained in a public statement, "would be assured by giving unlimited access to the tapes to a very distinguished man, highly respected by all elements in American life for his integrity, his fairness, and his patriotism, so that the man could satisfy himself that the statement prepared by me did indeed include fairly and accurately anything on the tapes that might be regarded as related to Watergate."

That "very distinguished man," Senator John Stennis of Mississippi, whom Nixon kept referring to as "Judge" Stennis, was nearly deaf and seventy-two years old. He had supported the president down the line on just about all his controversial decisions, and knew next to nothing about Watergate developments because he had spent most of summer recuperating from a mugging on a street outside the Capitol early in the year—a detail that granted the president the added maudlin advantage of sympathy: nobody in the polite little village that was Washington, D.C., would dare challenge a damned thing Stennis said.

In a statement published in the Saturday morning papers, written in the rueful tones of a man determined to protect the rights of a poor, pitiable, helpless victim from her traducer, Nixon explained, "The attorney general made what he regarded as a reasonable proposal for compromise

and one that goes beyond what any president in history has offered." He said Archibald Cox had had it within his power to end this excruciating constitutional crisis all on his own, because if only he had accepted this magnanimous offer "there would be no further attempt by the special prosecutor to subpoena still more tapes or other presidential papers of a similar nature." But Cox, villainously, had refused. "Though I have not wished to intrude upon the independence of the special prosecutor, I have felt it necessary to direct him, as an employe of the executive branch, to make no further attempts by judicial process to obtain tapes, notes, or memoranda of presidential conversations."

An "employe of the executive branch." What did that mean? Was it a threat?

Yes, it was. The president had presumed that the backstopping of Ervin and Baker would be enough to rid him of this meddlesome priest, and this irksome tapes business, once and for all. Instead, on the evening of Saturday, October 20, he had to order a massacre.

THE GRAY-HAIRED HARVARD PROFESSOR IN THE BUNCHED SUIT STEPPED up to the press conference microphones. Networks broke into the soap operas. This show was more melodramatic anyway. Arms folded, Archibald Cox said that to comply with the president's orders "would violate my solemn pledge to the Senate and the country." He then explained that the president, in "refusing to comply with the court decrees," was selling the nation a bill of goods: that a summary of tape contents would probably not even be admissible in court—which may have been Nixon's point in insisting on summaries. He promised to continue court efforts to obtain the tapes themselves, and said that if the president refused to comply with his orders, he would find him in contempt of court.

In Syria, Israeli forces reached within ten miles of Damascus. In Oslo, the announcement was made that Henry Kissinger (but not Richard Nixon) would share the Nobel Peace Price with his North Vietnamese negotiating partner, Le Duc Tho. And in Washington, Chief of Staff Alexander Haig relayed to Attorney General Elliot Richardson a direct order from the President of the United States. On D-day in 1944, Richardson had been a twenty-three-year-old platoon leader who pulled to safety a fellow officer shot in a minefield. He later recalled that the decision he now faced felt equally stressful. He had been ordered by the president to fire Archibald Cox. He decided to refuse it, and resign instead.

Alexander Haig, who everyone remembered had shown up in his

general's uniform on his first day as chief of staff, like he was Pinochet or something, telephoned Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus, now acting attorney general, with the same demand: "This is an order from your Commander-in-Chief." Ruckelshaus refused and resigned, too.

The acting attorney general was now a man named Robert Bork, who wore a funny little beard and was so far to the right he had opposed outlawing racial segregation. He followed orders. The word went forth: the office of special prosecutor had been abolished as an independent entity. The TV cameras then recorded an unbelievable scene: FBI agents, acting on a White House directive, sealed the prosecutor's office—thousands of pages of evidentiary documents, interview tapes, painstakingly prepared reconstructions of criminal and near-criminal events, the entire bureaucratic infrastructure of the investigation, all the prosecution's evidence for every last Watergate trial from lowly Bud Krogh to mighty John Mitchell: now it was impounded, off-limits to anyone.

Men at arms, summoned by the President of the United States asserting his authority over another coequal branch of the government; the most sensitive and crucial inquiry in the constitutional history of the republic—cut down, perhaps for good. To the suspicious circles it felt as though a fascist takeover was imminent.

NBC'S ANCHORMAN: "THE COUNTRY TONIGHT IS IN THE MIDST OF WHAT may be the most serious constitutional crisis in its history." The head of the American Bar Association said Nixon was waging "an intolerable assault upon the courts, our first line of defense against tyranny and arbitrary power." A former ABA head, the prominent Houston lawyer Leon Jaworski, who had been considered friend enough to the president that his name was suggested to head his defense, said the FBI's actions "resembled those of the Gestapo." Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia said that "this sounds like a Brown Shirt operation thirty years ago." Senator Robert Packwood of Oregon, a Republican, said that "the office of the Presidency does not carry with it a license to destroy justice in America." Edmund Muskie came out for impeachment. And Sam Ervin now revealed the president had deceived him into accepting the Stennis compromise—privately claiming to Ervin that the deal was for verbatim transcripts, then turning around and telling the public it was for summaries.

Archibald Cox, too, rushed out a statement: "Whether we shall continue to be a government of laws and not men is now for Congress and ultimately the American people to decide."

On Sunday, as Israeli forces encircled the Egyptian Third Army and pushed within forty miles of Cairo, and Henry Kissinger flew to Moscow for emergency discussions about the Middle East crisis, Western Union offices in Washington were flooded by more than a million telegrams. Senator James Buckley, William F. Buckley's brother, and three conservative Republican House members announced that 90 percent of their constituents wanted the president fired. HONK FOR IMPEACHMENT, read signs in Lafayette Park; the 1600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue became bedlam as motorists obliged them. "If he didn't hear," an observer said, "he had cotton in his ears." A thirty-four-year-old couple from Baltimore soon ran out of their supply of three thousand impeachment bumper stickers. "We both voted for Nixon because he had a secret plan to end the war," one told the AP. "Now he's got a secret plan to end the Justice Department."

The American Civil Liberties Union took out an ad explaining: "Why it is necessary to impeach President Nixon and how it can be done." Its membership rolls exploded. Ralph Nader announced a grassroots campaign for impeachment. Seventeen law school deans jointly demanded appointment of a new special prosecutor. At the AFL-CIO's annual convention, nine hundred delegates adopted a resolution demanding impeachment or resignation—a humiliation indeed: AFL-CIO chief George Meany had been a key recruit toward Nixon's dream of a post–New Deal "New Majority." The next day Meany released a statement averring, "The events of the last several days prove the dangerous emotional instability of the President," and that he should either resign or be impeached.

Since early in April, when then–attorney general Mitchell defiantly told senators if they wanted White House aides to testify before them, they would have to wait for the House to proceed, as the Constitution stipulated, toward impeachment, the "I" word had been the White House's ultimate tool to shut critics up. The presumption was that any such constitutional apocalypse was unthinkable. No longer. When the House returned to business on Monday, October 22, congressmen introduced forty-four Watergate-related bills. Twenty-two, sponsored by eighty-four separate members, called for impeachment or an investigation of a possible impeachment.

AT LEAST THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS HAD BEEN STAYED. ON MONDAY, the superpowers jointly agreed to sponsor a United Nations cease-fire to go into effect two days later. On Tuesday Democrats voted for the Judiciary Committee to hold impeachment hearings; the din from La-

fayette Park was still seeping through White House windows as Charles Wright and Alexander Haig attempted to assure reporters that tyranny had not befallen the land. But Haig did not help his case when he boasted with a grin that it had been his own idea to send the FBI to seal Cox's office, and that his actions had been entirely appropriate.

Tuesday was the day Judge Sirica set for the White House to answer his order to produce the tapes—a date set at a less dramatic time, but one Sirica still demanded the White House honor. It was also the day, at high noon, that Speaker of the House Carl Albert told a crowded press briefing that he had authorized the House Judiciary Committee to begin work on an impeachment inquiry. Sirica's ceremonial courtroom was jammed. Everyone in Washington wanted to be there to hear Nixon's lawyer turn the next screw, and to see what this courageous judge would do in response. It was as if the Constitution hung on a hinge.

Sirica read aloud his August 29 order to produce the tapes, so nervous that he accidentally read a part of the document twice.

Charles Wright stepped to the well of the courtroom: "Mr. Chief Judge, may it please the court. I am not prepared at this time to file a response. I am, however, authorized to say that the President of the United States would comply in all respects with the order of August 29. . . ."

Since Sirica could not believe what he had just heard, he asked the lawyer to repeat himself.

"He will comply in all respects with what Your Honor had just read. As the court is aware, the President yesterday filed with the clerk of the court a response along different lines, along the lines indicated in the statement to the country Friday. That statement, if it was ever officially filed with the court, is now withdrawn. . . .

"This President does not defy the law, and he has authorized me to say he will comply in full with the orders of the court."

"This President does not defy the law": people used to take that for granted. At least, though, the crisis had been averted. Crises were being averted all over—for a minute, at least.

THE SOVIETS SAID ISRAEL WAS THE FIRST TO BREAK THE CEASE-FIRE, BY preparing a move on Damascus. They issued an ultimatum to the president: stay Israel's hand, even if it takes American military force, or "we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider taking appropriate steps unilaterally." Maybe that meant arming *all* the Arab states. Or pouring troops into the Middle East. American intelligence learned that seven Soviet airborne divisions—hundreds of thousands of personnel—had been mobilized, aircraft readied in Yugoslavia to move them, and

forty thousand amphibian naval infantry prepared to sail the Mediterranean toward the battle zone. Nixon called it "the most serious threat to U.S.-Soviet relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis." Compounding the frustration, the United States had been pressing Israel to honor the cease-fire. But in a post-Vietnam strategic context, America had trouble getting even allies to do what it wished.

Alexander Haig, Schlesinger, and the CIA director met late into the night, without bothering to wake the Watergate-addled president. They decided to move the military from DEFCON 4 to DEFCON 3—all troops reporting to barracks for possible mobilization for battle. Soviet officials, who were bluffing, were amazed at the panic. "Who could have imagined the Americans would be so easily frightened," one said. A Johnson administration official told *Time* that the administration had received similar bluster at the end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and simply ignored it.

The Middle East war ended to headlines that Union Oil's profits soared 62 percent in the third quarter and Exxon's were up 81 percent, and the conclusion was immediately drawn: DEFCON 3 had all been a Watergate-motivated hoax. KISSINGER: ALERT ISN'T A COVER-UP, read headlines for a press conference in which the exasperated national security advisor said, "We are attempting to conduct the foreign policy of the United States with regard to future generations. . . . There has to be a minimum of confidence that the senior officials of the American government are not playing with the lives of the American people."

Around then Gail Sheehy returned to a bar she had visited in summer, now for an October 24 issue of *New York* in which every feature article was about Watergate.

"'I believe in a dictatorship,'" one patron told her.

"'More strongly than you did before?'

"'Much more strongly. This whole thing is a black eye to the country. . . . I think the President should be above the law, definitely.'"

Three times as many protesters clogged Lafayette Park as when the Saturday Night Massacre went down a week earlier. But they weren't all protesting the president. Some were protesting the protesters. GOD BLESS NIXON, one of the signs read: "We're glad that we have a President who still has nerve. We're glad we have a President who isn't namby-pamby. He should have gotten rid of Cox a long time ago."

Ronald Reagan seemed to agree. The *Los Angeles Times* canvassed prominent California Republicans after the Saturday Night Massacre. The vice chairman of the state party was "appalled"; Houston Flournoy, the likely Republican nominee to replace Reagan as governor, was "dis-

mayed and appalled." Reagan, on the other hand, released the statement: "I will not comment on the issue of Archibald Cox being discharged since it is relatively unimportant." Then, naturally, he commented. The dilemma Nixon faced in Cox's defiance was "the same problem that confronted President Truman during the Korean War." He referred to Truman firing Douglas MacArthur after the general made personal public statements advocating the invasion of China—apparently an offense of equal gravity to rejecting the Stennis compromise. "What is important," he said, "is that the President has agreed to make available the pertinent information contained in the tapes. Now we should have patience until the content of those tapes is known." Then, the next day, when the White House violated the Stennis compromise, Reagan announced he agreed with that, too: it "justifies our continued patience and confidence that our system of government is continuing to work. . . . Yesterday, I urged that all of us should be patient. The President's actions today avoids any appearance of defying the courts."

SOON, THOUGH, THE WHITE HOUSE ACTED IN A WAY THAT MADE ITS DEFIance of the courts unmistakable. Meeting with Judge Sirica in chambers to discuss procedures for handing over the subpoenaed tapes, White House Watergate lawyer Fred Buzhardt admitted that two of the tapes, including what was allegedly the very first recorded presidential discussion of the Watergate break-in, and a crucial April 15 meeting in which John Dean told the president he was meeting with Watergate prosecutors, did not exist.

The *Detroit News* had been among Nixon's most stalwart Watergate defenders. Now it editorialized, "Someone in the White House is guilty of either unbelievable stupidity or outright lies." Reporters called House Speaker Carl Albert for his reaction: "I am past the point of reacting," he said with a weary shake of the head. The cartoonist Herblock depicted Richard Nixon as a conjurer holding his magic wand over a puff of smoke marked "disappearing justice officials" and "disappearing tapes." A widely read Wall Street newsletter reported that the New York Stock Exchange had contingency plans in place, quietly announced to top traders, to cease trading immediately for as long as two days immediately upon Nixon's resignation. (Reportedly traders were angry; they expected a big rally when Nixon stepped down.) *Time* magazine published its first editorial in fifty years of publication. It called for Nixon's removal from office.

William F. Buckley Jr. sent around wires to prominent conservatives asking whether the *National Review* should do the same. The most prominent recipient: Ronald Reagan. He sent a two-word reply: "HELL NO."

Time's title legend read, "Nixon's Jury: The People." The jury was not leaning the president's way. The issue sold a record 350,000 copies on the newsstands. The next Gallup poll recorded a historic low in presidential approval ratings: 27 percent. A *Los Angeles Times* letter writer observed, "Please to remember the Fifth of November gunpowder treason and plot. I see no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot."

A genuinely scary Halloween. In New Jersey a weeklong swamp fire threw up smog that produced a sixty-car pileup and nine deaths. In New York the *Times* editorialized on a subway accident in which "miraculously no one died": "According to passengers' testimony, it was nearly an hour before either instructions or help reached this dangerous and frightening scene."

In *Esquire* Tom Wolfe noted the fact that people who hijacked airplanes and took over buildings were becoming cultural heroes to an alienated populace—seen as men "at the end of their ropes" risking it all in a struggle against the "system." The terrorist, as his fan construed it, created "his own society, his own system: in the bank vault, in the Olympic quarters, in the prison courtyard . . . striking out against the endless exfoliations of American power. . . . I finally cut through the red tape. . . . *I am a celebrity!*"

Trick-or-treating was just about too frightening to contemplate. The Copley newspaper chain's advice columnist was asked how to "protect our small 'spooks.'" He replied he could do "five columns on this subject." His best advice: don't let children enter anyone's home; don't let them follow a stranger anywhere; and most of all—don't accept unwrapped items, or eat anything before it's been examined by an adult: "Sadists have been known to insert pins, razor blades, glass and even poison into food for the children." (This actually was just an urban legend.) The AP's advice columnist added "drugs hidden in malted milk balls." After a nine-year-old girl was murdered on Halloween in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, the *Milwaukee Journal* questioned whether trick-or-treating itself just provided a time and place to make "children easy marks for sick minds."

Parents too scared to let their kids trick-or-treat alone would have missed a Bill Moyers special on PBS that was pretty scary in itself. He argued that the Cold War had drenched the nation in "something of the

paranoia Germany had when Hitler came in." Grantland Rice's "it's how you play the game" had transmogrified into Vince Lombardi's "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Watergate, then, was no less about Richard Nixon than it was about *us*, an emanation of our national soul: a nation that now believed "it's us against them, and the only goal is to win, with no quarter asked or given."

Moyers closed the show with a roundtable. One member was a political science professor. The other two were a former Republican official and the Washington editor of *National Review*, a bow-tied young gentleman named George Will. The Republican official was contrite: "We felt only Nixon could save the world." George Will was utterly scathing, granting Nixon no quarter. He blamed Watergate on hysterical Republican partisans insisting "that virtually every possible Democratic candidate was a garish sham who would destroy the country, *but* we couldn't trust the American people to choose that way in a fair fight." The panel suggested the near impossibility of finding any Republican who would defend the administration.

It thus revealed the political isolation of Governor Reagan, still maintaining that "when they calm down a bit," the American people would "take pride" in a system that so efficiently rooted out a few bad apples.

RONALD REAGAN WAS NOT JUST ISOLATED ON WATERGATE. HE WAS ISOlated on the energy crisis, too. With thousands of San Francisco gas stations shuttered and Los Angeles officials projecting 35 percent energy deficits for 1974, and state demand for electricity increasing 8 percent annually, on October 3 he vetoed a bill to create a five-member commission with power to approve and site new power plants, devise and implement conservation plans (including invoking regulations controlling the sale of electrical devices like toasters and irons, amending building codes, and requiring fluorescent instead of incandescent lighting), and promote research and development of new energy sources—"independent," an aghast *Los Angeles Times* editorial pointed out, "from the kind of special interest influence that has helped retard sound energy policy planning for so many years." He also shocked observers by simultaneously vetoing a bill that he had previously supported to establish air pollution control districts in six California counties.

Democrats predicted "blackouts for years to come." Moretti said Reagan had just killed "the most important and far-reaching piece of legislation of the last ten years." Others pointed out "serious conflicts of interest": hadn't Reagan been a paid propagandist for General Electric? Reagan, with blithe confidence, just said the program hadn't been studied thoroughly enough and contained too many "unacceptable features." (The next month the pilot of his state-leased Cessna 500 announced he had cut the craft's cruising speed 25 knots and began flying higher to reduce air resistance, saving twenty-five to thirty gallons per round-trip between Sacramento and Los Angeles.)

Reagan defied the spirit of the age: Americans believed government could easily and harmlessly tell economies what to do—on meat prices, fuel prices, wages, whatever. Richard Nixon hardly hesitated to oblige them; his program of price controls announced in August 1971 was already in "Phase IV," extending governmental authority to dictate prices into the following spring. Administration skeptics like George Shultz called it intellectually bankrupt: "We have seen baby chicks drowned, pregnant sows, and cows bearing next year's food slaughtered," he told the president, all because of the hubristic refusal to let the free market allocate scarcity. That fell on the deafest of ears—as the president, on the day of Reagan's energy veto, used his discretionary authority to control the allocation of home heating oil and propane gas to dealers nationwide. He was only giving the people what they wanted.

Reagan had a different way of looking at things. He said the public was hoodwinked about the power of government to solve their economic problems by those same devouring Gila-monster bureaucrats he had cast as the enemy in the Proposition 1 fight, now in its home stretch.

Moretti campaigned in the homestretch with an anti–Proposition 1 op-ed that included the following inspiring passage: "The 1973–74 state revenues, as defined by the plan, are divided by 1973 estimated personal income to reach the starting point of 7.6 percent. In 1974–75, 0.1 percent is subtracted from this number (thus, 7.5 percent) which is then multiplied by estimated 1974 personal income. The resulting amount is what the state is permitted to spend in the next fiscal year. When this amount, roughly $9.3 billion, is compared to how much the state will have to spend next year simply to maintain existing programs and services, roughly $9.9 billion, the only option remaining is to cut more than $600 million from existing programs." Snooze. Reagan campaigned by spending four times more than the opposition on snazzy television commercials. The campaign also sent out a fusillade of automated recorded phone messages. The governor, meanwhile, made frantic rounds of the state on what critics pointed out was a jet plane partially paid for with taxpayer funds, as he bellowed forth about the Gila monsters: "When a government becomes powerful, it is destructive, extravagant, and *violent*."

The voters went to the polls, defied Jimmy the Greek, and sided with the Gila monsters—voting down Proposition 1 by 54 percent to 46.

Objectively speaking, it was hard to pry much of a message about the mood of the public from the results. Turnout was anemic. Voters were confused at the initiative's stupefying complexity. Be that as it may, pundits outside the state drew a simple conclusion: as a national political figure, they wouldn't have Ronald Reagan to kick around anymore.

"VOTERS SMARTER THAN REAGAN," editorialized the far-off *Milwaukee Journal*. "The proposition had the surface appeal of the politicians' favorite, but false homily," the *Journal* patiently explained, "that says government should 'live within its income' like everyone else.' Government in fact is not like everyone else, but uniquely different. It alone can, and must be able to, determine the level of its own income, through the taxing power. To equate its financial situation with that of a private household is utter illogic. To say the resources of a sovereign government shall be chained forever after to whatever the tax laws happen to yield at a given moment in the past is dangerous nonsense." A government, they said, was a vehicle for sorting out human priorities. "Reagan's demagogic ploy would have gone at them all backward, by starting with an arbitrary, pre-fixed revenue ceiling regardless of what had to be done and who would get hurt. And it's always the poor who get stuck worst under that kind of tax philosophy." This conventional wisdom did not look to be changing anytime soon.

A victory on Proposition 1 was supposed to propel Reagan on a nationwide tour to sell the concept to other states. Now he had lost—and promised to make the tour anyway. His janissaries promised to fight alongside him. "What if," the governor's director of consumer affairs sincerely asked, "Martin Luther King Jr. had said, 'I have no dream'?" Reagan himself proclaimed, "How can trying to reduce the people's taxes be a defeat?" Everything always works out in the end, gloriously.

THE DAY AFTER THAT CALIFORNIA VOTE, RICHARD NIXON WENT ON TV and announced "a very stark fact: we are heading into the most acute energy shortage since World War II." Americans, he said, would have to cut back: "less heat, less electricity, less gasoline"—almost stop being Americans at all.

There had been no panic up until then. Oil tankers loaded with Middle Eastern crude when the embargo was announced were not about to turn back; any practical decrease in supply would probably take at least six weeks to develop; the amount of oil at stake was only a small fraction of the supply anyway. The president, however, pushed urgency. Maybe he wanted to reassure Americans that they still actually *had* a president. Maybe he wanted to reassure himself.

He called for shorter school and factory hours. And the cancellation of 10 percent of jet flights. The federal government would provide an example by setting thermostats to 68 degrees or less, he said ("and that means in this room, too, as well as in every other room in the White House"); government vehicles would be limited to 50 miles an hour. He told governors to pass 50-mph speed limits in their states, Congress to pass an emergency statute returning to year-round daylight saving time, relaxing environmental regulations, hastening construction of nuclear plants and the Alaska pipeline. Start carpooling, he recommended: "How many times have you gone along the highway," he quizzed, "with only one individual in that car?"

Thousands of times, of course—for wasn't zooming alone across endless vistas of highways supposed to be the most American pastime of all?

Not anymore, apparently. What he was describing, Nixon allowed, sounded "like a way of life we left behind with Glenn Miller and the war of the forties." The president implored his hearers instead to make another comparison: that time, which seemed so long ago, when America first landed a man on the moon:

"Let us unite in committing the resources of this nation to another new endeavor, an endeavor that in this Bicentennial era we can appropriately call 'Project Independence.'

"Let us set as our national goal, in the spirit of Apollo, with the determination of the Manhattan Project, that by the end of this decade we will have developed the potential to meet our own energy needs without depending on any foreign energy sources.

"Let us pledge that by 1980, under Project Independence, we shall be able to meet America's energy needs from America's own energy resources."

Then the president went off script. Jutting out his chin, he said he would like "to close with a personal note." He began with a brag. "We have ended the longest war in America's history. All of our prisoners of war have returned home. We have made progress toward our goal of a real prosperity, a prosperity without war." And yet: "*some* publications have called on me to resign the office of President of the United States."

"I have no intention whatever of walking away from the job I was elected to do. As long as I am physically able, I am going to continue to work 16 to 18 hours a day for the cause of a real peace abroad, and for the cause of prosperity without inflation. . . . And I am confident that

in those months ahead, the American people will come to realize that I have not violated the trust that they placed in me when they elected me as President of the United States in the past, and I pledge to you tonight that I shall always do everything that I can to be worthy of that trust in the future. Thank you and good night."

THE PUBLIC STILL TRUSTED HIM ENOUGH TO BEHAVE AS IF THE ENERGY equivalent of Pearl Harbor had already arrived. Honoring a nonbinding presidential request, gas stations began closing down from 9 P.M. Saturday through midnight on Sundays. So people began "topping off"—filling their tanks every time they passed a gas station, leading to hours-long lines in which idling cars . . . just wasted more gas. Everyone wanted to get to a pump before the last drop was gone and one of the ubiquitous SORRY, NO GAS TODAY signs was hoisted up. Then they would have to return tomorrow—when prices were usually two cents a gallon higher. Tempers flared, no architect having thought to design a corner gas station for the eventuality of dozens of angry motorists cutting fellow motorists off at street corners like drivers in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Time called the energy crisis the "most serious economic threat to face the nation since the Depression." Schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut, states reliant on oil for heat, announced Christmas break for the entire months of December and January. At the New England School of Art, heated only to 65 degrees in the Boston chill, nude models were afforded the comfort of roasting in their own body heat in a clear plastic tent. A farmer in Muncie, Indiana, became famous for a Rube Goldberg contraption to convert manure into methane to power his lights, refrigerator, and Ford pickup; another in Leslie, Michigan, achieved his fifteen minutes of renown by doing the same with leaves, brush, and garbage. Children begged permission not to bathe; didn't heating water waste energy, too?

On the Watergate front, on November 13, Ronald Ziegler announced "Operation Candor": over the next weeks, the president would "fully and publicly" answer all charges. Joseph Kraft, in a column titled "Toward Impeachment," was not impressed: "President Nixon, in fact, is one of the least trustworthy witnesses on his own behalf." *Time* pointed out this was the thirteenth time since the scandal began to unfold that "Richard Nixon vowed to disclose all of the facts and put the story to rest."

The story, lately, was about finances. On November 17 the *Washington Post* front page trumpeted devastating new findings in the old saga of the "milk money," the hundreds of thousands donated to the Republican Party as early as August 1969 from dairy interests in exchange for price supports for their industry: the Associated Milk Producers' lawyer now revealed the donations came after a conversation with Attorney General John Mitchell about how to buy favor with the administration. Other stories concerned the president's personal finances: about how he had hidden profits from a Florida land sale by registering the deed in the name of his daughter Tricia; about how he claimed California as his voting residence even though he paid no state taxes there; about three previously undisclosed financial trusts benefiting Nixon controlled by Haldeman and Ehrlichman. The evening of the *Post*'s dairy story the president submitted himself on live TV to the questions of the nation's newspaper managing editors, who were meeting at Disney World. Before they could ask him about his financial dealings, he volunteered his own account—one uncannily similar to the first grand slam he hit on live TV: the 1952 "special fund" speech, which had saved his political life under circumstances at least as dire as the ones he faced now. His conclusion gave the water-cooler wags the most memorable catchphrase of the scandal so far.

"I have never profited, never profited from public service—I have earned every cent. And in all of my years of public life, I have never obstructed justice. And I think, too, that I could say that in my years of public life, that I welcome this kind of examination, because people have got to know whether or not their President is a crook. Well, *I am not a crook*."

The President of the United States was not a crook. That was surely good to know.

The Operation Candor reviews were not kind. *Time* said "the list of . . . the distortions, innuendoes, and false assumptions is astonishing." And that was *before* the story of the Gap.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT CAME FROM FRED BUZHARDT, A WHITE HOUSE LAWyer: his review of the tapes to prepare them for the court subpoena revealed that for eighteen and a half minutes in the middle of a conversation between Nixon and Haldeman from June 20, 1972, all you could hear was a buzz.

A now-private citizen named Archibald Cox explained the import before Judge Sirica's bench: the June 20 meeting had been "the first opportunity for full discussion on how to handle the Watergate inci-

dent. The inference that they reported on Watergate and may well have received instructions is almost irresistible." Another inference flowed immediately from the revelation: No claim of Richard Nixon's had been more strenuous than that the tapes were under "my sole personal control." So didn't that make the gap his sole personal responsibility? The prosecution team, now under the direction of a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, got to work investigating whether the president had *personally* destroyed evidence of criminal wrongdoing. Earthquake upon earthquake: this was Watergate now.

The prosecution put forward a female lawyer, Jill Wine Volner, to question the scandal's latest, unlikely, protagonist: Rose Mary Woods, Richard Nixon's personal secretary since 1951. On November 8, Judge Sirica asked her whether it was possible to accidentally erase a tape. She replied, "I don't think I'm so stupid as to erase what's on a tape." Now, under rapid-fire questioning from Volner, she offered a convoluted, contradictory tale of how she had done exactly that—one involving foot pedals, push buttons, an unexpected phone call, and a long bodily stretch. Investigators and news photographs then found themselves assembled in her White House office for a demonstration of the push-button-and-foot-pedal stretch in question. But during the demonstration, she *couldn't* push down the pedal and the button at the same time. She had to have been lying.

Newsweek's next cover: "Rose Mary's Boo Boo." You soon could buy the image on a souvenir silver ingot, comically embossed, "18 Minutes of Hum Along with Dick and Bob 1973," to add to your expanding collection of Watergate kitsch—which also now included an eight-track tape starring eighteen and a half minutes of silence, "Sealed in a 'perfectly clear' plastic case for all to see."

IN RHODE ISLAND, A PRIZE HIGH SCHOOL COMPOSITION WAS CUSTOMARily chosen to be signed by the governor as the official state Thanksgiving proclamation. The governor refused to sign this year's winner, in which a seventeen-year-old wrote, "Thanksgiving seems to be pretended, a farce, little more than an outdated tradition no one has yet found time to discard." *Time*'s Thanksgiving cover had Archie Bunker in his trademark easy chair, stalactites of frost hanging from his cigar and winter cap—he couldn't afford home heating oil. *Newsweek*'s featured a freezing Uncle Sam holding an empty cornucopia and the legend "Running Out of Everything." Jesse Jackson said, "When the energy crisis is exposed as the hoax it is, it will be bigger than Watergate." Adding to the sticky precipitate of national dread was an issue that was supposed to be

dead and buried: Vietnam. Governor Reagan, in Singapore as a special presidential representative for a trade deal, said North Vietnam must "return" the POWs and MIAs supposedly still being held, and that if it didn't, "bombing should be resumed." He accused liberals in Congress of taking away "the power to sway those monkeys over there to straighten up and follow through on the deal."

A coffee table book, *They Could Not Trust the King*, with text by William Shannon of the *New York Times* editorial board, went to press. It called Watergate "a complex and far-reaching political plan that could serve as dress rehearsal for an American fascist coup d'etat." In Memphis, Nixon addressed governors for an "Operation Candor" meeting where, one of the governors leaked, he had reassured them that no Watergate bombshells were imminent and that all seven extant subpoenaed tapes were "audible"—even as he knew about the eighteen-and-a-half-minute gap. A court-appointed scientific panel ruled with virtual certainty that the erasure had to have been deliberate.

Senator Jackson opened hearings investigating the energy crisis with an accusation: "For the major oil companies," he said, "the shortages were good business." He said the White House knew the crisis was coming and did nothing, in order to help his friends' bottom lines. Plastic bags, made with petroleum, became prohibitively expensive; petrochemicals were also ingredients in many lifesaving drugs—so pharmaceutical executives projected a shortage. Twenty-five New Hampshire towns suspended police, fire protection, garbage pickups, road repair, and school transportation. The mayor of Rensselaer, Indiana, turned off the city's 425 streetlights, until a rash of burglaries forced him to turn them on again. In an interview he revealed his motives as less than Christian: "If everyone in the country would make this kind of effort, we could tell the Arabs to go to hell."

Unchristian motives were everywhere. A gas station owner stopped letting drivers of big cars buy more than a dollar of gas at a time—"just enough to keep them off the road." People started driving with a full can of gas in the trunk, which turned their cars into inadvertent firebombs. The Senate came within eight votes of passing a law rationing gasoline.

Then December, and the presidentially mandated closing of service stations from Saturday evening until Monday morning. A Hanford, California, gas station owner shot up six of the pumps of a rival who stayed open across the street. A Miami man yelled to a gas station attendant who wouldn't sell to him on a Saturday night, "I am going to get some gas even if I have to kill somebody"—and then, waving a pistol, almost honored his pledge. Auto supply houses ran out of siphons, tools